JOB CONTROL AND THE INSTITUTIONALISATION OF LABOUR RELATIONS IN THE WORKPLACE: A STUDY OF TWO ENGINEERING FIRMS IN ENGLAND

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SUMMARY

This thesis is based on observation and interviews carried out in two engineering firms in the West Midlands between October 1978 and May 1980. Besides presenting and analysing a core of empirical material, it seeks to develop a general argument concerning the material and social bases of control over labour in the workplace. In doing so, this research points out some of the ways to link two major trends in the literature: the institutional approach to the study of labour relations and the more recent studies of the labour process.

During the 1970s, the two companies studied implemented a reform of labour relations which appears to be typical of developments which took place in engineering and, more generally, in the manufacturing sector of British industry over the decade following the publication of the Donovan Report. The problem under study is the impact of this institutionalisation of workplace labour relations on the control workers have over the utilisation of their labour power in the work process.

The fieldwork showed that, behind similar organisational and institutional features, sharply different work relations had developed. The degree of control imposed by manual workers over issues such as assignment of labour, labour mobility, manning levels, job demarcations, immediate intensity and distribution of effort, was significantly higher in one of the two case studies. At Firm A, the institutional reform helped management to confine job control within narrow limits while, at Firm B, similar changes did not help management to reduce worker control over effort but rather contributed to stabilise it.

In seeking to explain this social process, attention is given to management strategies and to the strength of workers' organisations. It is also argued that the nature and contours of the work process sets the material basis for control over labour utilisation, the pattern of control also being shaped by social relations in the workplace. The main implications of the research for theory and policy are discussed in the final chapter. It is suggested that although job control resisted changes in the structure of labour relations, in a context of economic recession, it might be more vulnerable to market pressures.

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Although all these people greatly improved the finished product, I alone am responsible for the shortcomings and difficulties which remain in the work.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on the control exercised by British engineering workers over specific aspects of their work. More specifically, it seeks to analyse the impact of the recent reform of workplace labour relations on job control. The analysis is based on observation and interviews carried out in two engineering firms in the West Midlands between October 1978 and May 1980. The main objective of this introductory chapter is to develop a conceptual framework which will be useful in analysing the empirical material and in raising the broader implications of the research for policy and theory.

Control over labour utilisation in the production process has recently become a central theme in the study of labour relations. In this sense, Hyman (1975:12) defined the subject matter of industrial relations as the 'processes of control over work relations'. This notion of control is also a good starting point for interpreting the different functions and objectives of both management and trade unions.

Considering first the study of management, Storey (1983:1, 98) noted recently that the question of managerial control of labour, and especially the more value-laden notions of managerial prerogatives and management rights, had been relatively neglected by British scholars in the field of industrial relations. In contrast, as he pointed out, this had been a classic theme in the North American literature. In Britain, much attention had been given to such themes as workers' organisations and activities, industrial conflict, and the institutions of labour relations. It appears, however, that the tide has turned over recent years. Above all it is Braverman (1974:63) who has contributed most to reasserting the view that

control over the labour process was 'the essential function of management in industrial capitalism'. Contributors to the voluminous post-Braverman debate, conducted mainly at a theoretical level, have become more and more critical of Labor and Monopoly Capital.[1] But the point here is that the structures and strategies developed by management to control labour at the point of production have remained a major theme throughout these discussions. Besides this trend, moreover, a concern with the current lack of knowledge about management behaviour, as well as the greater predominance of management in times of economic recession, have led to a considerable growth in research into management policies and strategies in industrial relations (Winchester, 1983:107).

As for labour, the encroachment of management control has been a constant preoccupation all through the history of workers' organisations. As Hyman and Elger (1981:115) have pointed out, 'workers' controls within the labour process and its organization should be viewed as a natural extension of the type of counter-control inherent in all forms of trade union action'. In this sense, the pioneer study of Goodrich (1975) gives a good account of worker control in British industry in the first quarter of the century. Its central concept of the 'frontier of control' remains an interesting tool of analysis (Marsden, 1978:2-7; Edwards, 1983:22-5). The history of craft control and job control in Britain, especially in the engineering industry, provides the background of the present research on control in the workplace. For instance, the reasons for the comparatively wide diffusion of worker regulation from craftsmen to important segments of semi-skilled and unskilled labour in Britain remain a challenging question. Nevertheless, the contemporary definition of job control adopted here refers

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1. For recent contributions to and reviews of this debate, see Littler, 1982; Littler and Salaman, 1982; Wood, 1982; Edwards, 1983; Storey, 1983; and Manwaring and Wood, 1984.

to a more precise and circumscribed phenomenon.

This study focuses on the overall influence exercised by employees, once they have been hired, over the way their potential is converted into effort. More precisely, job control is defined as the restraints imposed by workers on the way their labour power is utilised by management in the work process. The meaning of this concept will become more obvious in light of the following analytical framework. The notion of job control will also be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6, so that only three considerations of the above definition need to be stressed at this stage. First, in such discussions on worker control the term 'control' is considered only in its relative sense (Friedman, 1977:82-5). It refers to a set of constraints or limits imposed upon management freedom in a context where the latter assumes responsibility for strategic decisions and is in command of the operations. Second, workers are acting from a defensive position, since management has the initiative and holds, in most situations, the ultimate power to reconsider not only the terms but also the very existence of the employment relationship. Third, it may be of interest to note that job control and restrictive labour practices broadly encompass the same reality, although from a different ideological viewpoint. The 'problem of restrictive practices' has been a focal point of criticism concerning trade union practices for a very long time in Britain (Zeitlin, 1980:119-20), and it became a major point of contention in the context of the industrial relations crisis which led to the Donovan Commission.[2] In comparison, it is felt that the concept of job control is both more precise and more conducive to objective research.

The other part of the problem under study is the institutional reform

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2. Important discussions on restrictive labour practices are found in Flanders, 1964; Donovan Commission Research Papers no. 4, 1967; Donovan Report, 1968; and Aldridge, 1976.

of workplace labour relations. The idea here is to analyse the impact of changes in the structure of labour relations on job control. This institutional reform is studied as part of the dynamics between managerial strategies to control labour and workers' adaptation and resistance. Institutional reforms are also likely to reflect some evolution in the balance of power between the parties.

Before going further, it is necessary to set out the analytical framework of the study. In particular, it seeks to establish the relationship between productive activities and the institutional components of labour relations. A second section discusses the nature of the reform of workplace labour relations in the British context. The third and final section deals with research strategies and methods.

1. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

A central argument of this study is that the function of production is at the heart of the whole spectrum of labour relations in the workplace. It suggests that a direct reference to the work process could contribute to a better understanding of the relations between labour and management at this level. Such a proposition needs to be developed in some detail.

The concept of labour process refers to the transformation of material into a product by the utilisation of labour and the instruments of labour. It is a process by which a combination of the activity of the workers and the use of material resources (machinery, tools, equipment, natural and raw materials, etc.) results in production. However, the labour process is more than an activity of production; it also involves social relations at the point of production. It is appropriate to stress Burawoy's distinction between these two aspects of the labour process:

> It has two analytically distinct but concretely inseparable

components - a relational and a practical aspect. I refer to the relational aspect of the labor process as the relations in production or production relations. They are, for example, the relations of the shop floor into which workers enter, both with one another and with management. In its practical aspect the labor process is a set of activities that transform raw materials into useful objects or fractions of useful objects with the assistance of instruments of production. This involves labor, the expenditure of effort, the translation of the capacity to work into actual work, of labor power into labor. (1979:15)

From this analytical distinction between the practical and the relational aspects of the labour process it is possible to establish a corresponding distinction between the concepts of work process and work relations. Hence, in this study, the definition of work process is restricted to the practical or technical aspect, whereas work relations refers to the relational aspect of the labour process, and is a synonym for relations of production. At a later stage an attempt will be made to operationalise the concept of work process (or technical labour process) so that it becomes a useful tool of analysis.

Therefore, work relations are the immediate (or direct) relationships between workers and managers at the point of production. Such a definition is broad enough to cover the relationships into which workers enter with one another as well as those occurring between members of different strata of the management team. Interesting as these relationships may be, however, they are not the major preoccupation of students of control in the workplace. Rather, attention focuses on the two characteristic elements of work relations: the sale of labour power and the control over the work process (Hyman, 1980a). In the study on job control, social relations dealing with the second element of work relations are the most relevant; these are the relations of subordination between management and

workers.[3]

This type of analysis directs attention to the social function of management in the capitalist enterprise. While profitability remains the ultimate object of the enterprise, the essential function of management is to control the utilisation of labour and capital in the work process. Management's objective is not to maximise control but to develop the pattern of control which is more conducive to the optimal utilisation of labour power. Much of the complexity of the managerial function may be understood in reference to the distinction between labour power (or the worker's capacity to work) and labour. In the words of Braverman (1974:54), 'what the worker sells, and what the capitalist buys, is not an agreed amount of labor, but the power to labor over an agreed period of time'. The contrast between the great potential of labour power and the many constraints upon its realisation in the work process represents one of the main features of control in the workplace. These constraints upon the realisation of the potential inherent in labour power are of at least two different orders. In the same way as for material resources, some limitations, such as injuries or health problems, are independent of the will of workers or managers, and others are due to problems of work organisation. Certain constraints, however, are the result of conscious and deliberate obstruction by the workforce to the realisation of the potential inherent in their labour power. This form of resistance, which may be spontaneous or organised, is peculiar to labour.

Paradoxically, part of the problem for management lies in its dependence upon a variable degree of initiative, discretion and skills on the part of labour. In a recent article, Manwaring and Wood (1984) have insisted

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3. In the usual distinction established by Flanders (1975:88) and Fox (1966:6-7; 1971:158), relations of subordination correspond to managerial relations, while those having to do with the sale of labour power are called market relations.

on the role of subjectivity and 'tacit skills' in the contribution of labour to production. These resources are inherent in labour power and workers may be willing to co-operate and apply them to the production process. The problem for management is that this very autonomy and discretion can be turned against the employers' interests. In modern conditions of production, simple coercion is usually counter-productive to dissolving worker resistance. Hence it is in order to secure worker co-operation or compliance with the conversion of his or her labour power into effort and profit that management has to organise its own structure of supervision and control. The worker is thus subordinated to management control.

This discussion of the transformation of labour power into effort already points to the material basis of conflict in the workplace. In the words of Edwards and Scullion (1982a:5), 'the process of production involves continuous conflict over the terms on which employers extract effort from workers'. This 'struggle for control' focuses mainly on the deployment of labour and the level of effort, and conflict is likely to occur when organised workers infringe upon 'management rights' to direct labour. In capitalist relations of production, the possibility that such conflict occurs is exacerbated by the opposing interests of the two parties involved at the point of production. Hence Nolan (1983:303) points out that what 'distinguishes the employment relationship from other types of exchange' is that 'the parties continue to stand in a contradictory relationship after the exchange has been consummated' (see also Gabriel, 1978:344). In such a context, the relations of subordination and the exercise of management control are a persistent source of tension and conflict.

Each of the two elements of work relations defined above is a potential basis for conflict. The existence of conflictual interests concerning the

sale of labour power, or market relations, is obvious. But sources of conflict relating to control over the work process are more persistent and pervasive. While management seeks to develop a pattern of control conducive to profit, workers are likely to try to impose some control over the way, and the conditions under which, their labour power is utilised in the production process. In sum, there is a fundamental conflict between the interests of management and labour, and these interests regularly develop into different patterns of rational behaviour.

Conflict, nevertheless, is only one of the two poles in the dynamics of work relations. The other is accommodation, and the material basis for co-operative relations stems from the interdependence of management and labour in the production process. Accommodation, however, does not imply that workers and trade unions recognise the legitimacy of the nature of this interdependence, and particularly their subordinate position. It means, rather, that under existing social relations of production, and independently of the underlying forces which affect people at work, the parties have to negotiate and eventually to compromise if the employment relationship is to be continued. In short, the parties have to bargain and seek to accommodate conflicting interests because they cannot do without each other.

Again a distinction, which corresponds to the two elements of work relations, can be drawn between the two aspects of interdependence. Firstly, the workers must sell their labour power to earn their living and employers must buy it to gain anything from their capital investment. Second, once they are agreed on a contract of employment, management and labour still have to make arrangements for the transformation of labour power into effort. The actualisation of the potentiality of labour necessitates the development of a <u>modus vivendi</u>, if a viable level of production is to be

maintained. Hence the primary economic function of both management and labour is determined by production, the source of conflict but also the source of compromise.

It follows that what characterises capitalist work relations is not so much the fundamental conflict of interest between the parties, which is itself a primary characteristic of other types of social and economic relations. It is the fact that management and labour have to achieve a relative degree of accommodation, in order to organise and maintain production, while their interests in the production process are contradictory. Furthermore, there is no easy solution for the parties involved since there is a need not only to maintain the relationship but to achieve a viable level of output, be it fixed by market forces, expected rates of profit, or other economic or political choices.[4]

This characteristic of accommodating conflictual relations in production is a dominant feature of workplace labour relations, for the object of labour relations is to govern, to bring some order into work relations. Labour relations are more or less structured, more or less institutionalised, through joint procedures and mechanisms for governing work relations and managing conflict. It may be useful to establish an analytical distinction between the relations conducted through the institutional framework

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4. Cressey and MacInnes (1980:5-16) present a stimulating discussion on the contradictory relationship between capital and labour. They point out that the relationship is contradictory for both capital and labour. Hence while labour seeks to resist the subordination of capital, it also 'has an interest in the maintenance of that relationship and therefore the viability of the unit of capital which employs it' (p. 15). Paul Edwards (1983:17) comments that Cressey and MacInnes's argument 'is an intermediate step, and not the fundamental explanation of the nature of the capital-labor relation, because it treats antagonistic and co-operative relationships on an equal footing. The present claim is that exploitation lies at the heart of the relation and that co-operation is a subsidiary concept reflecting the fact that capital has to induce workers to work.'

and those which develop without reference to, or indeed outside, any procedural arrangement. In general, it is also true that the more the relations are centralised the more they tend to be institutionalised, shop-floor relations leaving more scope for informality.

In these relations, the central objective of both management and labour is to reinforce or maintain their control over work relations. If the output of this process of control most often takes the form of rules, this is not the only form of control. The result of the power relationship with respect to labour utilisation cannot be circumscribed by referring exclusively to the web of rules, although this remains the focal point of attention. Many constraints upon management freedom to organise production lines, caused, for instance, by disputes over piecework standards, do not take the form of rules. One may point to deals which the participants describe with phrases such as 'precedent', 'one-off', etc. The empirical chapters will provide some evidence on these matters.

From what has been presented so far, it follows that the structure of labour relations has a derivative function with reference to production, the primary function of the enterprise. This means that labour relations are not an autonomous network of relations but are significant only in relation to production activities and social relations. As part of his critique of orthodox industrial relations, Hyman (1979a:428) pointed out that

> les auteurs traditionnels en relations industrielles ont présenté des analyses souvent sophistiquées de la 'régulation des tâches' et des 'systèmes de règles', sans reconnaître, du moins en apparence, que les superstructures (procédures et institutions) sur lesquelles ils se concentrent trouvent leurs fondements dans la sphère de <u>production</u>.

The author did not develop all the implications of his argument for the study of workplace labour relations. He did, however, emphasise its

corollary, which is that industrial relations should not be seen as a sphere of relations which is autonomous from social relations of production (Hyman, 1978 and 1979a). This also means that the structure of labour relations can be studied as a superstructure with reference to the labour process, the infrastructure underlying the relation between management and labour. From another perspective, this is a distinction between what is primarily a political process (regulation and control over work relations) and an economic function (production).

The proposition that productive activities represent the underlying basis of workplace labour relations is a major feature of this study's analytical framework. Hence in studying the impact of the institutionalisation of labour relations on job control, which is the object of the study, the first task is to assess the influence of the technical conditions of production. The intention is to ascertain whether the work process has a mediating influence on the relationship between the social process of the institutionalisation of labour relations and job control. Besides the work process, the other type of mediating factor which deserves major attention is social organisation. This is the study of management and labour or, more accurately, the shop-floor organisation. While the work process accounts for the material basis of the relationship, a careful study of management, of the workers' organisation, as well as of the social relations which develop between these two, is also essential to a proper assessment of the effect of institutionalisation on job control.

The intention is to establish a link between the institutional approach to labour relations and the labour process approach. Much in line with the Anglo-American tradition in industrial relations, a good deal of attention is given here to the procedures and institutions of job regulation. Indeed, much of the attention focuses on detailed case studies of the post-

Donovan reform of collective bargaining. But an effort is also made to apply the concept of work process to empirical research and hence to take advantage of some of the progress made in this area of industrial sociology. While there has been little integration of these two approaches so far, a better understanding of control in the workplace may be gained by trying to fill this gap.

2. INSTITUTIONAL REFORM IN BRITAIN

During the 1960s, public attention became increasingly concerned with the problems of the British manufacturing sector. Among these problems, the peculiarity of British industrial relations appeared to raise the greatest concern on the part of employers and government officials. The following discussion starts from the most authoritative and influential analysis of the industrial relations crisis, that of the Donovan Commission.

The Commission held the view that the substantial growth of work-place bargaining, which had been influenced to a large extent by the pressure of full employment, had generated industrial disorder. The most obvious manifestations of the crisis were the high frequency of unofficial strikes and the extent of wage drift, with direct effects on labour costs and inflationary pressure. It was also felt that the informal system was contributing to the inefficient use of manpower and the occurrence of restrictive labour practices. The latter was seen as the most fundamental problem.

While informal and fragmented bargaining appeared to be dysfunctional to many observers, the Commission recognised 'that the participants in the current arrangements are, generally speaking, well satisfied with them' (Donovan Commission, 1968:para 126). Among the possible advantages for the parties involved, the Report noted the flexibility of these informal arrangements and the fact that 'a very high degree of self-government in

industry is provided', in a situation where 'all work groups are given scope to follow their own customs and to take their own decisions' (para 129). However, the members of the Donovan Commission considered that these arrangements

> can be condemned only because the benefits are outweighed by the shortcomings: the tendency of extreme decentralization and self-government to degenerate into indecision and anarchy; the propensity to breed inefficiency; and the reluctance to change. (para 130)

According to the analysis of the Commission, these labour problems were primarily caused by major dysfunctions in the structure of labour relations (Purcell, 1981:chapter 1). The Commission emphasised the contrast between the formal and the informal systems of industrial relations, which were said to be in conflict (paras 149 and 162). More precisely, it was said to be a 'conflict between the pretence of industry-wide agreements and the realities of industrial relations' (para 176). Indeed, the formal position on managerial prerogatives had more to do with pretence or illusion than with reality, especially in engineering, and many held the view that working on the basis of such a false premise actually weakened managerial control. Professor Clegg, an influential member of the Commission,wrote later that

> managers were hindered from realistic attempts to use manpower more efficiently by the widespread illusion that 'the employment and discharge of workers, the manning of machines, the pace of work, the introduction of new machinery and new jobs' were, or ought to be, within the scope of 'managerial prerogative' when in reality they were in many instances under the control of work group customs. (1976a:448)

Hence the observation that the 'assumptions of the formal system still exert a powerful influence over men's minds and prevent the informal system from developing into an effective and orderly method of regulation' (Donovan, 1968:para 149).

The structure of labour relations was dysfunctional with respect to

its two major functions: the regulation of conflict and the stabilisation of management control. Neither the 'formal system' (with all its intrinsic limitations) nor the poorly developed structure of labour relations in the workplace could channel the pressure coming from what Flanders (1975:108-13) called the 'challenge from below'. This led to a diminution of management control, the development of a substantial degree of job control, and an outburst of conflict. In an important article first published in 1969, Fox and Flanders, two leading members of the 'Oxford School', pursued this analysis of structural weaknesses. Starting with a distinction between craftsmen who 'had always aspired to extend their own unilateral regulation' and 'non-craft groups whose shop-floor power awakened new aspirations', they explained how

> the established formal machinery of bilateral regulation too often failed to create the norms necessary to meet these new aspirations; partly indeed it was unable to do so because they were not susceptible to regulation by standardised rules throughout an industry, and employers in any case refused to negotiate on subjects they considered to be a 'managerial prerogative'. So the opportunity to deal with them bilaterally at the level of relatively large units of regulation was missed, and it was left to work groups themselves to impose what standards they could, thereby causing the regulative order to become fragmented over the new as well as the old issues of concern and conflict. (Flanders, 1975:266-7)

According to this well-known interpretation of Fox and Flanders, such fragmentation was equivalent to a breakdown of social regulation, where 'an excessive proliferation of normative systems can therefore produce social consequences that are similar to those resulting from the absence of any norms to regulate conflict' (Flanders, 1975:255).

Although the Report does not emphasise it greatly, the Donovan Commission pointed out that the pressure of full employment in the postwar decades had contributed heavily to the growth of workplace bargaining and the predominance of the informal system (see paras 74, 106 and 111). With

the development of vigorous and autonomous shop steward organisations and the rather unsophisticated nature of British management as regards labour control, work relations had deteriorated to the point of disorder in many workplaces. An additional factor, considered as a major cause of labour problems by structural reformers, was the anachronistic nature of many payment systems. Indeed, in engineering, traditional and outdated piecework schemes were seen by many as the primary cause of the breakdown of managerial control. It would appear that these causal factors, which put the accent on the limitations of the collective bargaining structure, represent the main elements of the Donovan analysis of the industrial relations crisis.

Independent of the intrinsic value of this analysis, the prescriptions for reform of the Royal Commission were very much in line with its definition of the problem. It recommended the reinforcement, if not the creation, of an institutional framework for conducting labour relations at the work-place or company level. The Commissioners enjoined management to develop 'comprehensive and authoritative collective bargaining machinery to deal at company and/or factory level' and 'joint procedures for the rapid and equitable settlement of grievances' (para 182).

The Donovan Commission expressed a strong belief in joint regulation, notably for its positive impact on the legitimacy of the rule-making process. Their position was also very much in the spirit of Flanders's famous observation that, in the context which has been outlined, management 'can only regain control by sharing it' (1975:172). A second major consi-deration which underlay their propositions is that management should recognise shop stewards as legitimate partners in building up such an institutional framework of workplace relations. Thirdly, the Commission considered that such a reform, for which management had a primary responsi-

bility, should be conducted on a voluntary basis. However, it recommended the creation of a Commission which would have the power to investigate and suggest specific ways to improve collective bargaining in particular firms. The Commission on Industrial Relations (CIR) was set up and contributed to the procedural reform (Purcell, 1979a; 1981).

The Donovan Commission, as well as most advocates of reform, argued for more rationality in the conduct of labour relations. Clegg explained how

> they proposed formalization because they believed that open acknowledgement of the extent of joint regulation in the plant by all concerned would lead to a much-needed rationalization of the whole process of collective bargaining. (1979:237)

The argument of rationality is one of the fundamental principles of the pluralist approach to reformism. It is, however, beyond the scope of this chapter to get involved in the interpretation or critique of this approach.[5]

It would also be difficult to assess the actual influence of the Donovan Commission in fostering change in workplace labour relations over the last fifteen years. What is relevant, however, is that, even on a voluntary basis, such institutional reform actually occurred. Two major surveys now provide convincing evidence to this effect. The Warwick survey (Brown, 1981) collected information from a sample of 970 manufacturing establishments of more than fifty employees. The major theme of The Changing Contours of British Industrial Relations was the formalisation and institutionalisation of labour relations at plant or company level. This was the result of several interrelated developments. To start with, the authors pointed to the growing specialisation and professionalism of

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5. For such a discussion, see in particular Fox, 1973; Goldthorpe, 1977; Clegg, 1975; Hyman, 1978; and R.K. Brown, 1978.

industrial relations management. Industrial relations had become a more central preoccupation of management, and as part of their strategy for reform, 'in the five years after 1972 almost half the manufacturing establishments of 50 or more employees took tangible steps to strengthen and formalise the position of their shop stewards' (Brown, 1981:74). This made easier the implementation of disputes procedures in the establishment and the formalisation of collective bargaining at plant or company level. Single-employer bargaining had become the most important means of pay determination for two-thirds of manual workers.

The recent comprehensive DE/PSI/SSRC survey (Daniel and Millward, 1983) presents findings based on interviews conducted in 1980 with managers and workers' representatives of 2041 establishments, a representative sample of the whole economy. Daniel and Millward put the trends previously observed in manufacturing in a wider perspective, thus showing the diversity of British industrial relations. The results of the DE/PSI/SSRC survey appear to indicate that the extent of change in institutional arrangements may have been less striking than had been suggested by the Warwick survey. When controlling for the different coverage of the two studies, however, their results are broadly similar for the manufacturing sector. Indeed, Daniel and Millward stress in conclusion that their results are comparable with the findings of previous surveys: 'nearly all of those comparisons have shown a growth in the formality of workplace industrial relations, either in terms of the presence of institutions such as committees or the presence and use of formal procedures and processes' (1983:295-6). It should be added that other surveys and case studies gave further evidence of institutionalisation (in particular Parker, 1975; Knight, 1979; Storey, 1980; and Purcell, 1981).

It seems widely accepted that this reform proceeded roughly along

the lines of the Donovan recommendations. According to the Warwick survey, 'by the late 1960s the problems that came from informal, fragmented workplace bargaining were painfully obvious to most managements. Whether or not they were aware that they were doing so, they set about following the reforming prescriptions of the Donovan Commission' (Brown, 1981:118; see also Brown, 1981:50 and Clegg, 1979:240, 436). Purcell, who conducted empirical research in companies where the CIR had intervened in an attempt to reform industrial relations, also observed that 'the central thesis' of the Donovan Commission 'has become widely accepted and remains a major influence on management and trade union thought in industrial relations' (1981:7).

The analytical framework presented here suggests an analysis of the industrial relations crisis which is slightly different from the orthodox interpretation. It may be useful, therefore, to point to those elements of the analytical framework which will be conducive to empirical work and eventually to the development of the general analysis of this study.

The first of these factors is the work process. In looking for the material basis of job control, attention will be paid to the detail of the work processes in three factories. Using the theoretical discussion on the labour process, an effort will be made to render this concept operational in pointing out specific dimensions for observation. A second focus of interest will be the nature and character of shop-floor organisations. Since workshop control can hardly be dissociated from types of workplace organisations, there will be a discussion of the specific character of the British shop steward system. Thirdly, since management is in command of the organisation of production, its policies and strategies for controlling labour are obviously a major concern of this study. Consideration will therefore be given to these material and organisational factors prior to

discussing changes in the institutional framework of labour relations. The underlying assumption is that technical conditions of production and social organisation may set the conditions for variable degrees of worker autonomy and control. Much depends on forces generated outside the factory, particularly labour market pressures: these more or less favourable conditions for job control may be amplified by the coherence or deficiencies of labour relations institutions.

To conclude, the analytical framework leads to a theoretical proposition which has major implications for the interpretation of the industrial relations crisis. Indeed, it suggests that the structure of labour relations is not the primary cause, or the most important factor, in the development of a given pattern of control over labour utilisation, although it is usually an important factor. If such a proposition can be supported by empirical evidence, it may well be that the Donovan Commission exaggerated the autonomy of labour relations and hence the possibilities of structural reform.

3. RESEARCH STRATEGY AND METHODS

3.1 Research Strategy

It should be obvious by now that the main preoccupation of the study is not so much with the scope of workers' influence as with their actual degree of control over particular aspects of labour utilisation. The focus is on the true extent of workers' challenge to management control, of their incursion into matters which many would regard as managerial prerogatives. In studying the impact of institutional reform on the degree of job control, it was felt that proper consideration should be given to the overall change in the pattern of labour control, not just to changes in formal collective bargaining. Attention had to be given to control over work relations at the point of production, which encompasses customary

regulation and worker unilateral regulation as well as the whole process of informal regulation.

Hence there is much evidence that the post-Donovan reform has generally produced an increase in the scope of formal collective bargaining (Parker, 1975; Knight, 1979; Storey, 1980; Daniel and Millward, 1983). More than a shift in the balance of power, this may indicate changes in the process of job regulation. Many of the issues now negotiated at plant or company level were previously controlled unilaterally either by workers or their managers. Accordingly, formalisation may have reduced job control, reinforcing management control over labour utilisation. Alternatively, it may have stabilised or even reinforced workers' control. (That is a stimulating but also very demanding object of study.)

To study this problem, there was a need for qualitative information, which could only be acquired through in-depth case studies. If observation in a limited number of workplaces appeared to be the most appropriate method considering the problem under study, there were also complementary reasons for following this path. Together with reading relevant literature, observation within factories was seen as a way to gaining a better understanding of British industrial relations. Indeed, a good grasp of this complex structure of labour relations was necessary to comprehend institutional reform. Similarly, a precise and concrete view of the process of regulation in a limited number of specific issues was also considered essential. In short, observation was not only the main method for collecting data, it was part of a learning process. All this was made more relevant by my situation as a foreign student.

The strategy, as well as the work more generally, was very much influenced by the great interest in workplace labour relations at the SSRC Industrial Relations Research Unit at the University of Warwick, to which

I was attached as a research student. Members of the IRRU played a major role in the development of research into labour relations at the micro level. Much of their empirical work had been undertaken in the engineering sector, partly because of the location of the University of Warwick. It was decided, partly for pragmatic reasons, that this study should also focus on this industrial sector. Empirical research was conducted in two engineering firms in the West Midlands, both manufacturing components for the motor industry. On the one hand, going into a field where so much knowledge and expertise was shared by many specialists may be seen as a poor strategy. On the other hand, the extensive amount of published material on workplace relations in British engineering could be seen as an asset. It made possible the acquisition of a degree of knowledge necessary before starting with the fieldwork and, by providing analytical tools and insights, it stimulated research and helped the development of analysis and arguments.

The research strategy was not a comprehensive plan which oriented the work from the beginning. Much in line with the empirical tradition, it was often more a question of pragmatic choices, in a context where the researcher was very much dependent upon his environment. As noted by Nicholson, Ursell and Blyton in their study on the Sheffield City branch of NALGO,

> in field research, what it is desirable or possible to investigate, and by which methods, is constrained by the access opportunities available to the researcher, research resources, and the special characteristics of the setting in which the research takes place. (1981:44)

Accordingly, it is fair to note that the design of this research as well as the specific nature of the problem under study evolved throughout the period of fieldwork.

While having no control over the object of study is a general rule

in social science research, there are further constraints which may be more peculiar to the type of study carried out here. The first of these is that this method of research requires the full co-operation of both sides throughout. Gaining access to a plant usually is the result of a long process involving dealings with senior management representatives, leaders of the shop steward organisations, and full-time officials of the respective unions. Once collaboration has been agreed by all parties, the confidence of the participants is never gained once and for all, and the researcher can only proceed to deeper and more sensitive issues if he or she has ensured this confidence. Observation and interviewing require a good deal of time on the part of many participants, a cost for which the results of fundamental research represent a very modest compensation.

A second constraint is that, in securing this co-operation, the researcher must preserve his or her independence from either side.[6] In contrast to many other research projects on management or on trade unions, the researcher cannot afford to take sides, or to get too involved in the activities and strategies of one or the other of the two parties involved in labour relations. And while doing so, he or she still has to raise and stimulate some interest for the research on the part of the participants. Thirdly, the whole process is made more difficult because of the conflictual nature of the relations between labour and management. Considering that managers and workers' representatives are involved in a struggle for control over work relations, they are naturally suspicious of the intrusion of any observer which might eventually affect their position or cause further difficulties. However, this constraint does not represent a major impediment

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6. Marjardet defined succinctly the problem of the independence of the research worker in the sense discussed here as that of 'ne pas être agi par tel ou tel acteur, manipulé et sommé de prendre parti' (1983:32).

if the participants as well as the observer are aware of and used to such a conflictual context. To the extent that managers and shop stewards perceive the conflict as having more to do with structures than with the character and attitudes of the people involved, and to the extent that they have developed bargaining relationships, the work of the researcher is made easier.

3.2 Research Methods

The main method of research was observation covering a period of four months in each of the two firms (from October 1978 to February 1979 in the first case, and from July to November 1979 in the second). Observation in the second factory (Firm B) was more regular, mainly because of its proximity to the University. Since the problem under study was also better defined at that stage, information regarding Firm B is more extensive in depth and coverage.

In both cases the researcher was allowed to move freely and meet people in the factory as well as to attend labour-management meetings. Given the emphasis I wished to put on the work process, a good deal of time was spent on the shop-floor. Basically, I tried to understand the sequence and integration between the operations, the division of labour, and the nature and complexity of particular jobs. The technique consisted mainly of talking to manual workers and supervisors about specific conditions of work, and the method of regulation of these conditions. I also enquired about the structure and working of management and of shop steward organisations. Besides production activities, observation also focused on various types of labour-management meetings, at different levels of the hierarchy. In both firms, I attended many of these meetings which consume so much of the time of labour managers, senior production managers, and leading members of the shop steward organisations. Some of these meetings had to do with the formal

disputes procedure. Other structures, such as the works council at Firm A and the JSSC-managing director meeting at Firm B, considered new issues on a monthly basis. For each of these, as well as for the monthly information meeting at Firm B, several meetings were attended, so that an assessment of the nature of the issues and the process of decision-making could be made. Finally, in both workplaces I took advantage of the opportunities to attend shop steward, JSSC, and branch meetings.

As Batstone et al. (1977:275) have noted, 'observation in practice involves a number of research techniques, not least informal interviewing'. Indeed, on many occasions observation would not be really fruitful if the researcher was not allowed to talk to people so that the nature and meaning of the situation might be understood. Although observation and informal interviewing overlap considerably, there is, at least in principle, a distinction to be made between these two techniques. In the first case, the researcher does not play any initiatory role; he is simply a good listener who does not seek to direct the flow of the conversation. In informal interviewing, the researcher plays a more active role in leading the communication towards specific issues in order to get precise information, or the informant's version on a given situation.

Most informal interviews were done on the shop-floor or at the employee's usual working situation, usually without an appointment and in a casual manner. These appeared to be positive conditions for an exchange in which the worker or the manager felt free to say what he knew and what he really felt about an issue. In some situations, the writing of short notes during the conversation was appropriate. However, depending on the subject discussed, it often seemed better not to be seen taking notes of the detail of the information. The writing up of extensive fieldwork notes had to be completed afterwards, on a day-to-day basis. Observation and

informal interviewing were therefore the primary sources of the information presented in this study. A large number of formal and more structured interviews were also carried out, especially at Firm B. In this case, thirty-four of these were conducted with shop stewards, supervisors, production managers, and labour managers. These in-depth interviews, for which I used an aide-mémoire, helped to get information of greater consistency and depth on a number of specific issues.

Besides observation and various types of interview, I sought to make use of all documentary sources available. At the early stage of each case study, I went through management files. At Firm A these were rather sketchy, although good series of data on matters such as absenteeism, labour turnover, years of service, and overtime hours were provided to assist the annual negotiations. Moreover, exhaustive notes were taken from the minutes of the works council monthly meetings, starting with the creation of this body in October 1975 up to early 1980. I also greatly benefited from the fact that the CIR had conducted an inquiry into Firm A in 1972-3. The report offered an important source of information on industrial relations in the early seventies, so that I could compare and account for changes in labour relations over a significant period of time. In the case of Firm B, I gradually gained access to a variety of sources from which it was possible to study the development of labour relations since the mid-sixties. For instance, original and detailed sources on the industrial relations crisis of the late 1960s are analysed in Chapter 4. The minutes books of the weekly meetings of the TGWU shop stewards' committee for the period December 1970 to September 1979 also were a source of information of considerable help.

Finally, follow-up research was undertaken in the two cases (in December 1979 at Firm A and in May 1980 at Firm B). This consisted mainly

of long interviews with key informants within the groups of managers and shop stewards. It proved to be particularly helpful in controlling for change over time and in testing ideas with participants at a preliminary stage of the analysis. Overall, therefore, some of the value of this method of investigation may lie in the complementarity of the techniques used. The validity of a specific piece of information can be tested by different techniques as well as different sources. On most issues, it was possible to confront the interpretation of many actors and hence go some way towards assessing the different interests and sets of arguments involved.

The analytical framework developed in this chapter has put some emphasis on the importance of studying labour relations with reference to production activities. Before elaborating the thesis further, it is therefore necessary to present in some detail the two manufacturing units which have been the object of the study. Hence Chapters 2 and 3 focus mainly on the production process, the composition of the workforce and the shop-floor organisations in these factories. The sequence of the following chapters is fairly straightforward. Chapters 4 and 5 deal with the institutionalisation of labour relations and its impact on management and workers' organisations. In two subsequent chapters (6 and 7), the empirical material on job control is analysed in some detail. These chapters form the basis for the general arguments of the dissertation, which are developed further in the 'General Conclusions'.

CHAPTER 2

WORK PROCESSES AND MANAGEMENT ORGANISATIONS

In line with our analytical approach, it is appropriate to set out in some detail the characteristics of the production units studied before looking at the institutions of labour relations. Chapters 2 and 3 introduce the main features of the work process, the nature of work, and the organisations of management and labour. This material will be used in two ways. First, much of the empirical data will be used in the development of analyses and arguments throughout the dissertation. Second, Chapters 2 and 3 are mainly, but not exclusively, about facts. They give the author an opportunity to set the basis for some of the explanatory factors of the thesis, notably concerning the implications of the work process for job control, as well as the specific nature of workers' organisations in British engineering.

Our main objective was to study the impact of reform in institutional industrial relations on worker control, by making comparisons between two or more workplaces. As noted in the preceding section on research strategy, it was decided to conduct a few in-depth case studies in the engineering industry. A major reason for directing attention towards our first case study was that the Commission on Industrial Relations (CIR) had conducted an inquiry there in 1972-3. By itself, this meant that the company had experienced industrial relations problems and that a reform strategy had at least been prescribed to its management. As all parties had agreed to give us access and to co-operate, we were able to ascertain that the institutional reform had been carried out, with major effects on the state of labour relations. At Firm A, labour relations were stable. While the domestic union organisation showed most of the institutional characteristics

usually found in engineering factories, it did not really manifest the strength and character which a foreign student had come to expect in going through the literature on this industry. Although the workers' organisation had accumulated a good network of rights and benefits, management was well in command of production.

In order to assess the actual impact of institutional reform and to explore the sources of variation in worker control, it was hoped that Firm B would have many points in common with Firm A so that a number of factors could be held constant. Hence we were looking for a comparison with another medium-size engineering factory in the West Midlands. It was hoped, in particular, that we would be able to study a more robust workers' organisation, one which could be seen as more typical of the engineering sector. We were therefore fortunate to gain the co-operation of the parties at Firm B, in which the unions had locally established a reputation for militancy in the late sixties.

As we proceed with the comparison of the two cases studied, it will be possible to control some of the variables which could have influenced the relationship between institutional reform and job control. The most important of these are the industrial sector, the type of product, the main technology used, and the financial situation of the company. As regards the important factor of size, the production process and the industrial relations structure of the two factories of Firm A were highly integrated, and these are treated as a single industrial organisation. If this were acceptable, the difference in size between the two cases would not be substantial enough to be seen as a major and independent source of variation (Edwards and Scullion, 1982a:26). Having said that, differences in the size of the factories were real and it follows that the influence of these will be considered at various stages of the analysis. If one

also considers that the two managerial organisations could be characterised, in very general terms, as relatively progressive, the two cases studied certainly had many features in common. And yet, this story is one of contrasts in labour relations. Hence a major theme of Chapters 2 and 3, a theme which will become more obvious at a later stage in the dissertation, is that behind similar organisational and institutional features, sharply different work relations were hidden.

1. FIRM A

1.1 The Company and Its Product Markets

Firm A, located in an area known as the Black Country (near Birmingham), was founded in 1924 and formed into a private company in 1941. The enterprise was originally a small machine shop located at West Bromwich. In the early 1950s the equipment was moved from West Bromwich to the current site of the machine shops, hereafter called Factory II. Around 1968 the foundry was reorganised in a separate plant, to be called Factory I. The latter was therefore a recent building, although it looked much older. The founder of the company was still chairman of the board a few years ago, and a member of his family was managing director at the time of the research. The enterprise still showed some characteristics of a family-owned and -controlled company, and it was not federated.

In October 1978, the company employed 815 people at two factories one and a half miles apart. There were 264 manual workers employed in the foundry (Factory I) and Factory II consisted basically of three traditional machine shops in which the iron castings produced in the foundry were transformed. The toolroom and drawing office as well as the company's head office were also located there. Hence, most senior managers and the large majority of clerical employees were based at Factory II, which employed

about 500 employees in October 1978, 430 of them as manual workers.

The firm specialised in the production of small components to the vehicle sector of the engineering industry. For many years, it had been a leading supplier of tappets and valve guides to the motor industry in Britain and in Europe. Most of the production was sold directly to the vehicle manufacturers, which meant that the company had relatively few customers, most of whom happened to be large enterprises. During a period of nineteen months ending on 31 July 1978, the turnover of £9.3 million was distributed as follows: Ford Motor Company, 41 per cent (in the UK, West Germany and Spain); BL, 16.5 per cent; Perkins (UK and USA), 13.5 per cent; Chrysler, 3.6 per cent; and others, 11.4 per cent. Direct exports represented approximately 29 per cent of the turnover in this period.

In such a market, the firm produced strictly in order to satisfy specific customers' requirements. This implies that marketing was the first function in the manufacturing cycle and production the last. While the enterprise supplied a very limited number of customers, it nevertheless offered a relatively large range of product specifications, each customer requiring many distinct product specifications for different models of vehicles. As a consequence, the company produced a mixture of batches of various quantities. Only a few product lines could be classified as mass production, in the sense that machine operatives were assigned to the production of a specific component continually on both shifts.

Firm A operated in a very specialised market and was the leading supplier of these components in the United Kingdom. Consequently, the company should have been in a good position to pass on the increasing costs to its customers, considering that these components were essential and represented a very small proportion of the customers' expenditures. However,

the company had not been able to take advantage of this position over recent years, mainly because of the decline of the motor industry in Britain and the competition of overseas manufacturers. This industrial unit also had very limited possibilities for diversification; to a large extent it was dependent upon a limited number of customers.

According to the figures provided by the company, it reported losses of £156,700 (8.3 per cent of turnover) and £142,100 (6.9 per cent of turnover) for the years 1971 and 1972.[1] During the financial years 1973, 1974 and 1975, the firm achieved small profits of £29,500 (1.1 per cent of turnover), £58,800 (1.8 per cent), and £75,500 (1.8 per cent). After a small deficit of £51,886 (1.1 per cent) in 1976, the company registered a profit of £151,048 (1.6 per cent) during the period of nineteen months which ended on 31 July 1978. The author is not in a position to assess convincingly the profitability of the company studied. However, the following observations are relevant for our purpose: the company's profitability during this period can confidently be characterised as very low; management frequently used this as an argument in its dealings with shop stewards; and these union representatives generally perceived the company as making little profit.

1.2 The Work Process

The whole process of fabrication of these components was highly integrated, from the manufacture of the mould in the foundry to final grinding operations in the second factory. One could regroup the successive processes of foundry production into three types of operation, to be executed in separate shops. First, there was the fabrication of the moulds,

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1. All these figures are those of profit (losses) 'after extraordinary items'. This means the remaining profits after financial charges and taxation, but before dividends.

from a mixture of sand and other substances, in the two core-making shops. Secondly, there were the various operations performed along the two tracks, which were used as mould conveyor and called the 'pouring tracks'. One could observe the repetitive work of those assigned to the loading of the tracks. The task of the casters then consisted of pouring the hot metal into the moulds, the most crucial operation in the work process of the foundry. Interestingly, the casters, of whom there were four on each track, received the highest basic rate and the highest average earnings per hour of all the manual workers of the two factories. From the tracks, the castings were directed to the 'round table', where the operators detached the castings from the moulds. This was one of the heaviest and most demanding jobs of the two plants, carried out in a very unpleasant working environment. Third, the castings were sent to the dressing shop, where surplus metal was removed. Foundry workers also did a rough inspection in this separate shop before the castings could be transported to the machine shops. The work of the largest occupational group in the dressing shop, the bobbers, was rather similar to that of the machine shop workers in the second factory. However, the machinery was more elementary and the physical effort more continuous in the dressing shop.

As expected, these foundry workers had to perform their tasks under poor working conditions. Rimmer, whose research was conducted in foundries in the West Midlands, observed that 'foundry work is generally characterized by great extremes of temperature and a dusty atmosphere, and is dangerous if workers are not sure of the correct safety precautions' (1972:10).

The three machine shops were the centre of most of the operations in the second factory. The largest group of workers consisted of 240 machine operatives divided into two job classifications: the machinists (128) and the operators. The basis for this distinction, dating only from 1978, was

that machinists were also setting their machines, in contrast to the operators. The machinists had to show a higher level of qualification, and the job of many of them consisted of operating a set of two or more machines, each of them executing one or a number of modifications on the component. The machinists also controlled the quality of the grinding operations performed at their work stations. Hence most of them were quite autonomous. They neither needed the help of the toolsetter nor appreciated the intervention of the patrol inspectors. Indeed, the machinists insisted on not recognising the 'skilled status' of toolsetters and patrol inspectors, two groups which had not served any apprenticeship. For their part, the machinists acted as skilled production workers, in contrast to the operators.

Machinists and operators transformed the iron castings into final products by making use of light but highly specialised machinery. Although these were conventional machine shops, various types of machinery could be differentiated, and this could be very significant for the study of job control. Hence, adopting the distinction made by Pierre Dubois, there were non-automatic machines on which the operative had to intervene at every cycle, and semi-automatic machines on which he or she did not have to do so in the same repetitive way.[2] Machine operatives working on semi-automatic machines only had a limited influence on the quantity produced because the job was, to some extent, machine-paced. For them, there were limitations to what could be earned from the piecework system. By contrast, the final grinding operations were usually performed on non-automatic machines.

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2. The original distinction reads as follows: 'Nous distinguons trois niveaux de machinisme: travail sans outil ou avec outil tenu à la main . . ., travail sur machine fixe avec intervention humaine à chaque cycle ou travail sur machine non automatique . . ., travail sur machine automatique (absence d'intervention humaine à chaque cycle)' (1978:175). The term semi-automatic machine is more appropriate than automatic machine to describe the machines in operation in the factories studied.

Many machinists working on these were highly autonomous production workers, with a good deal of control over the pace of their work. What operated against many of them as regards the effort bargain, however, was that they worked on isolated work stations. Ancillary workers had to move the castings from one work station to the next. In such a situation, piecework bargaining was conducted on an individual basis and machinists were on their own in their dealings with the work study engineer. Again, this useful distinction between isolated (or separated) work stations and linked work stations was suggested by Dubois and his colleagues of the Groupe de Sociologie du Travail (see in particular Dubois, 1978:175-6). These technical conditions of production will be analysed in Chapters 6 and 7, where it is suggested that the nature of the work process in the machine shops provides the basis for limited labour cohesiveness and strong management control.

However, a number of production constraints were likely to build up pressure and uncertainty and to have consequences for management strategies in labour relations. First, the work process was characterised by batch production. It was observed that it did not create anything like the situation of perpetual change seen in the press shops of the other firm studied. For one thing, the product demand was more stable and the typical size of batches larger in the case of Firm A. Moreover, the production of different specifications within the same category of castings did not necessitate major modifications with regard to layout of equipment and manning levels, either in the foundry or in the machine shops. Nevertheless, batch production required flexibility and was likely to generate uncertainly within the circle of supervisors and production managers.

A second constraint was a more regular cause of concern for management. The flow of castings coming from the foundry to the machine shops of the

second factory created problems. The two plant managers explained in interviews that they had not been able to accumulate a significant reserve of rough castings for the machine shops over the last couple of years. Such a reserve could have mitigated the consequences of fluctuations in the level of output. In the current situation, it was not unusual to have to stop production on some lines in the machine shops because of material shortage. Hence, over a period of six weeks ending on 1 December 1978, material shortage was the most important of seventeen categories of down time;[3] it made up 22.2 per cent of all hours of non-productive work. Over a similar six-week period ending in December 1979, material shortage accounted for 32.9 per cent of hours lost and was still clearly the major cause of down time. Over these two samples of six weeks, down time caused by material shortage made up as much as 4.8 and 7.6 per cent of all the working hours of production workers in the two factories. Finally, the CIR had stressed a third production constraint of some importance. It reported that 'the company is under continual pressure to maintain both the quality and quantity of supplies to the requirements of its customers whose stocks are normally only sufficient for about one week's production' (1973:para 8).

1.3 Management Organisation

The board of directors of the company was composed of nine people, four of whom were executive directors. They were supported by six other senior managers with the status of 'staff directors'. The personnel director was one of them, and he reported directly to the managing director. It is under his leadership that the integration of the institutions of labour relations at company level has been realised since 1974. There

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3. 'Down time' is the usual term for 'non-productive work' by production workers.

were, as well, three other layers in the organisation: managers (12), superintendents (19 in the production areas), and 35 foremen.

A relatively small network of senior managers (four executive directors and six staff directors) were able to exercise relatively strong control over the day-to-day activities of the company, and, in particular, its production. Some of the characteristics underlined in this chapter contributed to this. To start with, the company dealt with few customers in a single product market. This meant, among other things, that there was relatively little stress on marketing or on research and development. Moreover, negotiation with suppliers was not a crucial area of management activity, the foundry producing the castings out of raw material, which represented a comparatively limited proportion of total company costs.[4] Senior managers paid most attention to the function which was the most critical one: production. They were particularly sensitive to the level of production because of the high degree of integration of the operations within as well as between the two factories. Consequently, a very important proportion of management's strategies and interventions related to the objective of achieving the most efficient use of labour in operating the existing equipment. At least four of the staff directors were regularly involved in production issues on the shop-floor. And eleven of the nineteen superintendents with responsibilities for production reported directly to the plant directors.

An additional reason why top managers were very much in control of production was their computer information system. The application of the

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4. Over the period of nineteen months ending on 31 July 1978, 'direct materials and sands' cost the equivalent of 14.2 per cent of the company's turnover. The value of 'all other purchases' made up for an additional 20.3 per cent of the turnover. The item 'wages and salaries' represented 53.1 per cent of the turnover.

piecework scheme generated a substantial amount of data on the performance and working time of production workers. The data collected concerned the quantity produced, down time (broken down into 17 categories), individual earnings, and scrap work. These data were analysed by computer and broken down by department, by shift, and by operative, depending upon requirements. From the information collected from the piecework cards, managers also possessed the necessary data to work out direct labour costs and profit margins for every product specification. Senior managers did not necessarily take full advantage of this bulk of information, but it was certainly used to detect problem areas. Indeed, the impression which emerged from interviews with managers was that they were becoming more and more aware of the possibilities of the company's computer as an instrument of management control.

2. FIRM B

2.1 The Company and Its Product Markets

Firm B is an engineering firm in Coventry. It was formed in 1926 by the merger of two companies, one fabricating radiators and the other specialising in presswork. It moved to its present site in 1930 and became a public company in 1953. In August 1979, about 1,250 people were employed in the factory studied, 829 of them as manual workers. In contrast to Firm A, this company was a member of the local engineering employers' association.

Since 1955, the company had been part of a large engineering group, of which it was a wholly owned subsidiary. The activities of the group were not limited to the motor industry. It also had interests in the aircraft and general engineering industries. The group was based in England and had many subsidiaries in the UK, as well as some in Europe,

North America and South Africa.

In many ways, Firm B was a complex organisation: since 1976 it had been organised into four divisions, it sold its products to four different markets, and its manual workforce was paid according to various systems and, indeed, various piecework schemes. In August 1979, 476 manual employees were working in the Presswork Division, which produced half of the company's turnover during the same year. The activities of this largest division centred upon the manufacture of pressed components for the motor industry. Its main products were clutch covers, brake back plates and brake shoes.

Several characteristics of this product market had implications for the work process. As was the case at Firm A, this division was exclusively concerned with 'production to orders', i.e. production of batches to satisfy the specific requirements of customers. A major difference, however, was that most of the press shop production was not directly sold to vehicle manufacturers but to large manufacturers of components for the motor industry. Usually the pressed components manufactured at Firm B were assembled by the manufacturer of larger parts (e.g. brakes, clutches) and then sold to car manufacturers. At the time of our research, more than 80 per cent of the presswork output was sold to only three large component suppliers, Automotive Products Ltd., Lucas Girling Ltd., and Rockwell (Germany). The Presswork Division was therefore at the third layer of production, while the other firm studied was at the second layer. Such a position in the market had at least two major effects on the work process. First, the Presswork Division had to provide a large range of product specifications, to be produced in as many batches of different sizes. This was because each of its large customers offered a large range of products and specifications to the motor industry. Secondly, the organisation of production had to be highly flexible and capable of quick diversification

of its range of products. In short, to the extent that the leading assemblers of components diversified their order-books, their own suppliers, who happened to be of a more modest size, had to adapt quickly to maintain their share of the market.

The second largest division, the Heat Transfer Division, employed 238 manual workers and produced a quarter of the overall turnover in 1979. It produced a very extensive range of heat exchange equipment of all types and sizes. It was organised into two units of production corresponding to different product markets. The first, the Automotive Heat Transfer Unit (AHT), dealt with the firm's original market, the production of radiators for the motor industry. The company no longer supplied a significant proportion of radiators for volume passenger cars but manufactured replacement radiators for many leading models. The second production unit, Power Plant Heat Transfer (PPHT), produced cooling equipment for industrial engines, marine installations, and land-based power stations. Paradoxically, considering the size and complexity of these products, production within PPHT was not based on high capital investment, for example in comparison with the press shops. A major characteristic of the work process in PPHT was that research and development, and also marketing, played a more pivotal role than they did in any of the other production processes of the firms studied. Our observation and interviewing in this second division were mainly limited to the AHT unit.

A third division, the Heat Transfer Service Division, consisted basically of a number of radiator service branches in many large British cities. Finally, the fourth division dealt with a completely different product market, the production of space heating equipment for industry and offices.

From a number of documentary sources,[5] it is possible to outline the general trend in the company's profitability over the last decade. After a modest profit of £278,000 during the financial year ending in September 1969, Firm B reported six consecutive years of losses, ranging from £248,000 to £879,000. A recovery started in 1976, and the firm registered profits of £895,000 (5 per cent of the turnover) and £723,000 (4.2 per cent) in 1977 and 1978. However, the company suffered losses of £811,000 (5 per cent of the turnover) in 1979. These figures are consistent with a statement made by a group spokesman in 1980: 'Firm B have been the most consistently unprofitable subsidiary of our group. They made losses from 1970 to 1975 and in 1979 - and will do so this year'.[6] In August 1980, only three months after our final programme of interviewing, the company was sold to another engineering group.

2.2 The Work Process

The presswork production was concentrated in two large shops separated by a driveway. From the steel store, the raw material was cut to the appropriate size and then transported to the presses. These presses were the focus of the work process and the 130 press operators represented a homogeneous occupational group with a great deal of influence within the shop-floor organisation. The presses were laid down in four sections commonly referred to as the 'press shops'. The largest of these was press shop no. 3, where the presses of medium and heavy tonnage were laid down on ten production lines.

In the press shops, and especially in the two smallest sections, one

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5. These are the Reports to Employees, 1978 and 1979; the Annual Report and Accounts of the group for the years 1967 to 1978; and the Profit and Loss Account of Firm B for the years 1974 to 1977.

6. Coventry Evening Telegraph, 12 August 1980.

could observe many one-man operations, i.e. situations in which one press operator worked on his own. In these cases, the operator was supported by a 'designated shop labourer' who did the 'service' for a given work group. There were also many two-men operations, where two operators worked in a team on the same press. But most of the output was produced on lines of presses. Depending upon the nature of the batch and the number of presses which could be linked by conveyor belts, a production line could be manned by between three and twelve, and occasionally more, operators. They would then swop jobs regularly and receive the same piecework bonus.

The press shops were concerned exclusively with batch production and although there was wide variation in the size of batches, these were predominantly of small and medium quantities. This was not seen as an ideal situation by production managers, since it caused too many disruptions in the work process. In the words of the unit manager in shop no. 3, 'small batches imply greater use of setters, of fork-lift drivers; it is more difficult to manage, in one word, it is less efficient'.[7] Although the different sections and production lines were, as far as possible, organised according to product specifications, the lines frequently had to be reorganised several times during a single shift, for different batches. Such a change of batch almost inevitably meant that they would work according to a different standard, since the size or the weight of the component (if not the job content itself) would change. And this would often imply a reorganisation of the line, with different manning levels. In short, frequent reorganisation of the work process was usual in the press shops. All this meant that a multitude of standard quantities and manning levels had to be negotiated and re-negotiated on the shop-floor.

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7. Formal interview, 7 May 1980.

The presses represented the highest investment of capital in the whole factory. However, all the presses were non-automatic machines. This meant that on every press one operator had to press a button to start each cycle of production. Many presses could be operated at a maximum of 900 cycles per hour, and a work pace of 500 or 600 strokes per hour (and often more) was usual. This made for an unlimited margin for speeding-up. There was a huge gap between the quantity which could be produced during a short period of time and what might be agreed as a normal performance or, to use the technical term, the 'standard performance'. In such conditions, the determination of the standard time, usually referred to in terms of number of components per hour, was primarily a matter for bargaining. The wage-effort bargain and the intensity of effort were therefore major issues of day-to-day bargaining and conflict in the press shops.

In a presswork factory, the toolmakers have a very crucial role to play. Most of the work of the 93 toolmakers was centred upon the machining, fitting and repairing of tools for the press shops. In one of the two sub-sections of this large toolroom, there was a group of about 35 skilled machinists. In the second sub-section, a group of about 25 fitters was working mainly on new tools, and another, slightly larger, one was involved in the repairing of the tools from the presses. This latter group was divided into three teams, each of them under the leadership of a 'leading hand' chosen by the section manager. Members of this repairing section would frequently 'go down to the press shops' to complete the maintenance of the tools. The section as a whole occasionally took advantage of the strategic position of these toolmakers - directly involved as they were at production level - to apply sanctions against the company. This type of collective resistance was bound to create friction between the tool-makers and the toolsetters and press operators, who happened to be members of

a different union.

Since it is also intended to analyse in some detail various aspects of work relations in the Automotive Heat Transfer Unit (AHT), it is relevant to outline the contours of the work process there. The AHT unit was organised in three sections. A group of 50 manual workers was employed in the section of the tinsmiths, 39 of them being craftsmen. Each of the tinsmiths individually applied his skill to various tasks (of which welding was the most important) in the assembling of radiators, following a fairly traditional process. Various parts were transported by an overhead track to the different work stations. Over the previous twenty years, the importance of this group in the factory had declined dramatically. There were as many as 200 tinsmiths in the no. 2 shop in 1959. Nevertheless, they had preserved their shop rules and craft traditions, based on long-standing membership of the National Union of Sheet Metal Workers, Coppersmiths, Heating and Domestic Engineers (NUSMW). Also, a most traditional piecework scheme, which reinforced craft control, had been in operation since the shop had existed.

A second section, called Fitting and Welding no. 2 (FW2), was composed of nineteen semi-skilled workers. Their most important single operation was welding, but they also performed various ancillary tasks, some of them with rather obsolete equipment such as hand presses. Their main role in the work process consisted of preparing some pressed components coming from the press shops before their assembly by the tinsmiths. Here was therefore a section of time-rated workers whose position in the work process placed them between two groups of pieceworkers. Members of FW2 felt comparatively underpaid and, taking advantage of the fact that the press shops were producing in batch, their covert resistance often led to the formation of bottle-necks in the flow of material. Moreover, job

demarcation problems between the TGWU and AUEW members of FW2 and the tinsmiths generated tense work relations and conflict.

The third section of AHT consisted of a group of 24 semi-skilled workers. Members of this section, called the Copper Core section, performed various tasks related to the assembling and testing of radiator frames. This involved a mixture of purely manual jobs (i.e. without any tools), of welding, and it also included the operation of various types of equipment.

2.3 Management Organisation

Over the 1970s, the viability of the company studied was very much dependent upon the financial backing of the larger engineering group, which was itself quite profitable. Obviously this meant that the group's directors were showing a strong interest in the management of Firm B. The directors of the latter had to make decisions within firm guidelines on aspects dealing with major economic policies; this was especially the case for choices regarding product specialisation and investment. Hence the credits for investment, allocated annually by the group, were very limited over this last decade. Nevertheless, senior managers stressed in interviews that they were left with the necessary autonomy to manage the allocated resources and, in particular, to develop labour relations strategies which they felt would be conducive to profitability. In other words, it was up to them to develop the appropriate organisational structures and to organise and control production, within the boundaries set by the larger engineering group.

The managing director of Firm B did not sit on the main board of the group. However, one of the group's directors was chairman of the board of directors of Firm B; he was a non-executive director. The seven other directors of the company were executive directors, including the personnel director. These senior managers, as well as one additional divisional

manager, also formed the management committee, which met on a weekly basis.

The management structure of the company consisted of five hierarchical levels, under the guidance and co-ordination of the managing director, who was highly involved in the various managerial functions. The company being organised in four divisions, one or two of the senior managers responsible for each of these (level 4) were members of the management committee. These divisions were established on the basis of the different product markets, and the management structure had developed accordingly. In contrast with Firm A, where management control was remarkably centralised, in this case a good deal of influence was exerted at an intermediate level, that of the unit manager (level 3). In collaboration with the production control department and the section managers, the unit managers set the priorities for production on a weekly basis. Unit managers were in control of the day-to-day decisions with respect to production, and were also quickly involved if any 'labour problems' occurred. While, in principle, the section managers (level 2) had the responsibility for organising production and deciding 'on the running of the shop', most unit managers restrained this degree of autonomy. In a later chapter, attention will be drawn to the weakening of the position of junior managers, and foremen in particular, as the reform of labour relations proceeded.

3. COMPARISON AND SYNTHESIS

A major concern in this brief chapter was the influence of product markets upon the work process. The two firms studied had many points in common with respect to the product market and this provided some ground for comparison. Both were supplying components to the vehicle sector of the engineering industry, a sector in decline over the last fifteen years or

so. The two companies faced serious problems relating to their market situation, and the structural problems in this industrial sector have been worsening with the deepening of the current economic recession. Also, some figures showing the very low profitability of the enterprises studied were quoted.

Both firms operated on the basis of production to orders, by which production was organised to satisfy the specific requirements of a few large customers. And both were involved predominantly in batch production, which is usually associated with 'fragmented management control systems' (Kynaston, Reeves and Woodward, 1970). This gave managements more freedom of choice in elaborating their control systems, but it also led to a great deal of pressure and uncertainty.

As noted by Batstone, Boraston and Frenkel, 'the task of management is to make decisions in situations of uncertainty' (1977:155). Indeed, the degree of uncertainty arising from constraints imposed on the work process by product market considerations is likely to have a significant influence on the pattern of control over work relations. On this matter, the degree of uncertainty was found to be significantly higher and the work process considerably more fragmented in the press shops of Firm B, in comparison with the machine shops of Firm A. To some extent, this may be explained by referring to the evidence presented in this chapter.

The first point was that the size of batches was smaller in the press shops, where small batches were predominant. Secondly, there was a larger range of products, divided into a larger number of specifications (in terms of size and other requirements), in the Presswork Division. These two factors meant that major changes in layout of equipment, manning levels, and assignment of labour occurred more frequently in the press shops than in the machine shops of Firm A. Thirdly, Firm B sold most of its production

to large manufacturers of components. Operating at this third layer of production in the motor industry, the Presswork Division had to diversify its production to meet the requirements of the large intermediary between it and the vehicle manufacturers. Indeed, generally speaking, the product demand happened to be more stable in Firm A, a factor contributing to the reduction of pressure at shop-floor level.

Our main task in this chapter consisted of describing the main features of the product markets and the technical conditions of production. Many of these characteristics may have some influence on control over the labour process. Hence, in many ways, the work process at Firm B appeared to be more difficult to manage, an explanatory factor worth considering in our study of job control.

CHAPTER 3

WORKERS AND THEIR ORGANISATIONS

In this brief chapter, most of the attention focuses on the two shop-floor organisations, a term which refers not only to the shop stewards but also to the members they represent. Perhaps there is a tendency in the literature to overestimate the influence of the shop steward in building a stronger or weaker workplace organisation. Although the shop steward has a crucial representative role to play and is often seen as the leader within the constituency, the autonomy and strength of workplace organisation rest on a complex interplay of different factors. In trying to account for a substantial difference in the strength and character of the two shop-floor organisations studied, some attention is paid to social and material factors which may be influential. Hence we look in some detail at the composition of the labour force and the way the shop-floor organisation develops in relation to the workers' contribution to the work process.

1. FIRM A

1.1 Composition of the Labour Force

Since production at Factory I only started in 1968, it is not possible to compare the size of the workforce over a long period of time. However, a comparison of the data for January 1973, published by the CIR, with those we collected in 1978 shows a remarkable stability. While Firm A employed 783 people in 1973, this number was up to 805 in 1978. The number of manual workers was 691 and 694 respectively. Yet, changes occurred in 1979. Approximately 60 employees then accepted voluntary redundancy and many other jobs were also lost by attrition. The losses were concentrated in the dressing shop (Factory I) and on the night-shift of the

machine shops (Factory II), many employees being transferred to production work on days to replace those leaving the company. In other words, the company reduced drastically its labour force on nights and intensified production on days where labour costs are lower and the labour force is more easily controlled. Management explained its decision by referring to losses of orders and the need for a significant improvement in productivity. In a period of recession, management's strategy was to reduce labour costs and maintain a similar level of output.

The distribution of the workforce between the two plants did not show any variation either between 1973 and 1978. There was virtually no labour mobility between the factories. It was only in 1979 that management began to advertise the vacancies for one plant in the other factory. In any case, however, management discouraged inter-plant mobility, which occurred only exceptionally. In fact, management's view was shared by the workers of the machine shops (in the largest factory) to whom we talked. They emphasised the contrast between working conditions in the two factories and some referred to the foundry as a 'horrible place to work'. As one would expect, working conditions were indeed much more difficult in the foundry (dirty, dusty atmosphere; extremes of temperature; etc.).

Because such a division within the company's workforce might have many implications, we studied more closely the patterns of employment of the two factories. It seemed appropriate to look first at the data on length of service, a usual indicator of labour force stability. The series of data presented in Table 3.1 are not strictly comparable since the figures for Firm A cover manual workers only while those for the other firm are representative of all employees. In any case, our dicussion rests on the analysis of general trends at Firm A, the data for the other firm being presented here as a basis for comparison. Table 3.1 shows that there was

TABLE 3.1

LENGTH OF SERVICE OF CURRENT EMPLOYEES

	Firm A			Firm B
	Manual Workers - October 1978			All Employees - September 1979
	Foundry	Machine Shops	Total	
	%	%	%	%
Less than 1 year	18.3	10.2	13.0	12.4
1-5 years	49.6	33.1	38.8	20.8
6-10 years	19.6	28.4	25.4	25.4
11-20 years	7.1	16.2	13.0	25.1
Over 20 years	5.4	12.0	9.7	16.2
Number of Employees	240	450	690	1,310

a relatively stable pattern of employment in Firm B, especially when one considers the whole distribution. There was more continuity of employment than in the firm discussed here and, more typically, the situation at Firm B compared well (as a whole) with the four engineering factories studied by Edwards and Scullion during the same period (1982a:64).

The most striking data on length of service are those for the foundry, where a substantial majority of manual workers had been in employment for less than five years. This was, by any standard, a very discontinuous pattern of employment. If, again, one refers to the Edwards and Scullion research, this is comparable to the pattern of female workers in the clothing industry. This was an important element in the building up of their general argument on the pattern of control. The strength of their argument, moreover, was that high labour turnover was as much the result of a particular type of management control as one of the causes of weak labour cohesiveness.

The data on instability of employment at Firm A (and especially in the

foundry) are more significant when considering the remarkable stability in the size of the workforce within each of the two factories between 1973 and 1978. Indeed, what is striking when one studies the pattern of employment at Firm A is not so much the proportion of workers who were employed over the last year but the very sizable proportion of those who had between one and five years of service. Half of the foundry workers and one-third of the machine shop workers fell into this category. It does not appear that the usual interpretation in terms of an 'induction crisis' would explain this satisfactorily. It is possible to go some way towards understanding this pattern of discontinuity of employment by studying labour turnover.

TABLE 3.2

FIRM A: OVERALL RATE OF LABOUR TURNOVER FOR MANUAL WORKERS IN EACH FACTORY, 1974-78

	Foundry %	Machine Shops %
1974	45.5	19.7
1975	20.9	18.8
1976	24.7	10.4
1977	25.0	7.7
1978	29.9	15.0

A first glance at Table 3.2 will make obvious the significant variation in labour turnover over the years. If one looked for a crude average of labour turnover over this five-year period, it would be around 13 per cent in the machine shops and 28 per cent in the foundry. If the first figure does not appear to be unusual, labour turnover was certainly by all means very high in the foundry. By comparison, labour turnover at Firm B was 8.2 per cent for manual workers and 10.8 per cent for all employees over the year ending 30 September 1978. Over the following year, the overall rate

TABLE 3.3

FIRM A: LABOUR TURNOVER BY OCCUPATIONAL GROUP, 1973-78

	Skilled Labour	Foundry Production and Indirect Labour	Machine Shops Production	Machine Shops Indirect Labour	Total
1973	22	78	65	42	207
1974	18	100	36	37	191
1975	12	58	12	20	102
1976	7	46	17	24	94
1977	16	62	20	17	115
1978	12	85	19	27	143
Total number of separations	87	429	169	167	852
Percentage of total leaving over 6 years	10.2	50.3	19.8	19.6	
Percentage of manual workforce in October 1978	21.0	26.9	44.2	7.8	
Number of employees in October 1978	146	187	307	54	694

(all employees) was 14.3 per cent at Firm B and the annual Report to Employees 1979 stated:

> Despite two headcount reduction exercises during the year our labour turnover figure is well below the national average of 16.8% and it is clear that we have a large proportion of people who have stayed with the Company for a long time.

Indeed, one of the firm's[2] directors noted in informal interview that labour turnover might be too low in the sense that there were not enough 'new blood' and there were correspondingly too many customary practices which impeded upon labour productivity.

One may get a closer look at the situation by looking at Table 3.3. The contrast between the foundry and the machine shops looks much sharper.

The two smaller groups are quite interesting. Skilled workers accounted for a much smaller proportion of turnover than their relative size (21 per cent of manual workers). In contrast, ancillary workers (indirect labour) in the machine shops had a very high level of labour turnover. They caused the same proportion of labour turnover (almost 20 per cent) as the large group of production workers in the same factory, although the size of these two groups was obviously not comparable.

The contrast is particularly noteworthy when one looks at the two large groups of production workers. Production and indirect labour in the foundry accounted for half of all labour turnover, although it represented only a quarter of the workforce. By contrast, production workers in the machine shops were characterised by a relatively stable employment relationship. When enquiring about this marked contrast, one consistently heard the same explanation, which was also endorsed by the CIR (1973:3): 'the higher figure at the foundry is explained by the service pattern of the Yemeni employees who return home for a period after two or three years' employment'. In fact, the proportion of immigrant workers was estimated at about 65 per cent of all manual workers in the foundry in 1979. Most of them came from Pakistan and the Yemen. By contrast, they represented approximately 12 per cent of the manual workforce in the other factory, most of them working on ancillary and unskilled jobs. (Indeed, this may also contribute to an explanation of the high labour turnover for indirect labour in the machine shops.) Another striking resemblance to the situation observed by Edwards and Scullion in the clothing industry (1982a:57-8) is the fact that high labour turnover was not considered as a serious problem by managers. There was little problem in recruiting to replace those leaving, and quitting was not seen as an expression of conflict but as a characteristic of the composition of the labour force. Management compilation

(over a period of six years) of the reasons given by employees at the time of leaving, which is presented in Table 3.4, lends some support to this

TABLE 3.4

REASONS GIVEN BY EMPLOYEES* FOR LEAVING: 1973 TO 1978

	Foundry %	Machine Shops %	Company %
Better job	23.5	25.0	24.2
Family/ill health	8.4	8.8	8.6
Leaving UK	22.2	7.6	15.3
Retirements	4.0	9.5	6.6
Dismissals/redundancies	10.3	8.0	9.3
Died	1.9	3.8	2.8
No reason given	29.6	37.1	33.1
Number of separations	473	420	893

*Includes manual workers and staff. Only 41 of the 893 separations were by staff employees.

explanation, although the data are somewhat equivocal. It will be noted that the proportion of those leaving for a 'better job' and of those with 'no reason given' was substantial in both plants.

One may suggest another reason why the whole issue of instability of employment in the foundry was not much of a problem for management. Of the immigrant workers leaving the country to visit their family, some would come back and seek employment again in the foundry. The practice was that the company re-employed some of them, provided they had a good record. Until recently, they all started again at the bottom of the promotion ladder. In June 1979 the company agreed to an unpaid leave clause for workers visiting families overseas which reads: 'A maximum of thirteen weeks leave can be taken after five years continuous employment, with no loss of employment rights'.

In view of the pattern of employment described above, it appears that most of those concerned could not qualify for this. Besides the obvious advantage of re-employing the 'best' workers, this had the value of building up a reserve of trained employees within the factory. Let us take the example of the caster job, which was the highest grade in (and the most coveted of) the production jobs. Since some of these employees had already done this job, left the company and came back on a lower grade job, any absence or temporary shortage of labour on this most important job could be filled very quickly. There was also another way by which management made use of such a reserve of labour. It was not uncommon for some immigrant workers to introduce friends and relatives to the managers, even when there was no job vacancy advertised. Conversely, the plant director sometimes asked them to find someone to fill a particularly difficult job.

It is worth having a closer look at other aspects of the work situation of immigrant labour in this foundry. A sharp labour segmentation existed in terms of skill and occupational classification, a pattern similar to the description given by Rimmer (1972:32-7) who did some fieldwork in four foundries in the West Midlands. There were very few immigrants in the group of skilled workers. Moreover, although a sizable majority of all production and indirect labour were immigrants, there was still a significant pattern of segmentation within these groups. Hence, most of the 29 workers classified as 'bobbers' (the second highest job grade) in the dressing shop were white workers. While most of the jobs demanding heavy physical effort, in the unpleasant environment which characterises foundry production, were staffed by immigrant labour. This was the case for most jobs in the core-making shop as well as the work of the 'round table operators', who knocked the castings out of the moulds. It has to be noted that most immigrant workers achieved good earnings, at least by internal

comparison, although many had to work long hours of overtime to attain this. Hence, of the eight highest classifications (company-wide) for average gross pay in October 1978, six had a majority of immigrant workers. Indeed all of these earned more than the highest grades of skilled workers (including toolmakers, electricians, furnacemen, and maintenance fitters).

Some emphasis is placed here on the contrast between the Firm A factories as regards work relations and, especially, the patterns of employment. A high degree of instability of employment in the foundry was seen as the most striking feature in this respect. In this research, the most relevant question is not the significance of high labour turnover as an expression of conflict, but the extent to which instability of labour impeded the development of collective organisation and job control. As some researchers have pointed out, 'it has long been recognised that a factory characterized by instability is less likely to develop a strong shopfloor organization than one where the majority of workers have been present for many years: this has obvious implications for the discussion on collective action' (Edwards and Scullion, 1982a:55). High instability, therefore, may undermine the necessary basis for labour cohesiveness and organisation. A further consideration is that leaving may be seen as an alternative to collective resistance for expressing conflict. This would be in line with the labour market interpretation in terms of 'exit and voice' which was put forward by Hirschman (1972) and recently developed by American scholars (Freeman, 1980; Freeman and Medoff, 1980). Without putting too much emphasis on this general interpretation, it is certainly obvious that while a serious degree of collective organisation and control had developed in most sections of Firm B, a pattern of 'leaving rather than resisting' was observed in the other firm, especially in the foundry.

There was a clear segmentation between the workforce of these two

factories. Each plant recruited in a different stratum of the working population and there was practically no movement of labour between them. This objective division may be particularly significant considering the high degree of integration in the work process of the two factories.

1.2 The Shop-Floor Organisation

The CIR report provides some background information on the development of union organisation in Firm A. It was noted that

> by the early 1950s, although the TGWU had some members on the night-shift and the AUEW represented the toolroom and maintenance departments, the GMWU was established as the main union representing the semi-skilled production employees. The terms and conditions of employment for all manual employees followed those negotiated annually by the GMWU for its members in the company. After reaching a settlement, the GMWU sent copies of the agreement to the TGWU and AUEW for signature.
>
> By the late 1950s however the position began to change as the TGWU recruited increasing numbers of employees. (1973:7)

There is a long tradition of rivalry between the unions, especially between the two general unions, the General and Municipal Workers Union (GMWU) and the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU). Following an inter-union dispute, their respective regional secretaries signed a joint agreement in 1961.[1] The GMWU was recognised as the majority union, but it conceded to the TGWU the right to appoint a shop steward and to represent its members, all of them working permanently on the night-shift at Factory II. Indeed, the essence of the agreement was to recognise the union basis of the TGWU in one of the shifts in the machine shops, but to restrict its influence to this area. Nevertheless, inter-union rivalry was again severe in 1977. The minutes of a meeting involving the managing director, other

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1. 'Agreement on recognition of National Union of General and Municipal Workers membership, and Transport and General Workers Union membership', 1961; Appendix 1 of the CIR report.

senior managers, and four GMWU shop stewards read as follows:

> Management stressed the gravity of the present situation and the financial implications to the Company's continuing survival, also stated that many important changes had taken place within the organization which the Management believes can make the Company an extremely viable operation in the future.
>
> However, that future is seriously jeopardized as long as inter-union conflict exists within the Company, irrespective of the solving of the present dispute.
>
> The shop stewards replied that they were also concerned about the problem and its effects and indicated their intention to enter into negotiations with the other trade unions in order to reach an agreement regarding membership.[2]

On the initiative and insistence of management, which offered a formal (post-entry) closed shop agreement as a quid pro quo, the parties agreed on specific spheres of representation in 1978. This helped to stabilise the respective areas of each union within the company. Its content reflected the situation outlined below.

In October 1978, the TGWU represented about 70 per cent of all manual workers on the night-shift in the machine shops, including many members in the skilled grades. With very few exceptions, its membership was effectively limited to this segment of the workforce. On the day-shift, the GMWU had the monopoly of representation for the production and indirect workers. It also represented most foundry workers (Factory I). The Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers (AUEW) represented an overall majority of the skilled workers in the company, although its stronghold was on the day-shift at Factory II, where the toolroom was located. Finally, the electricians of both plants were members of the Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunication and Plumbing Union (EETPU). It should be noted, therefore, that each union organised a specific segment of the workforce, an additional source of fragmentation among the manual workforce. From the 'check-off list'

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2. Minutes of a joint meeting held on 21 October 1977.

provided by the company, it was possible to establish the membership of the individual unions in each of the two factories (Table 3.5). A comparison with the figures published by the CIR shows that, from 1973 to 1978, there was very little change in the respective influence of the four unions in the two factories.

Table 3.5 also gives the shop steward distribution at the time of our research. There were only twelve shop stewards in the company in 1973 compared with sixteen in 1978, the number of GMWU stewards having gone up from six to ten in this period. The average constituency size was nevertheless 43 members in 1978, a rather high figure for the engineering industry. However, there were interesting variations in the size of these constituencies and it is worth studying more closely the pattern of shop steward representation of the two general unions.

Contrary to what is seen as the general rule in engineering, the GMWU and the TGWU shop stewards did not represent a specific section. Indeed, the notion of a 'section', consisting of a group of workers involved in closely related operations, usually within a single shop, had hardly any significance with regard to work relations in this company.[3] For instance, there were about 170 GMWU members working on the day-shift in Factory II. This large group of machine operatives and ancillary workers were scattered in three machine shops and a few smaller working areas, and they collectively elected four shop stewards. Indeed, three of them worked in the same machine shop (no. 1) but, to them, this did not matter. The logic of the system of collective shop steward representation was not based on work groups or sections. The shop stewards collectively represented the members of their

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3. Batstone and his colleagues (1977:XV) defined a section as 'a team of workers on the shop-floor, often electing their own shop steward. The section often operates controls on overtime, lay-off rotas, and labour allocation.'

TABLE 3.5

FIRM A: TRADE UNION MEMBERSHIP AND SHOP STEWARD REPRESENTATION, OCTOBER 1978

	GMWU		TGWU		AUEW		EETPU		Total	
	Members	Stewards	Members	Stewards	Members	Stewards	Members	Stewards	Members	Stewards
Foundry	239	4	5	-	14	-	6	-	264	4
Machine shops	256	6	94	3	75	2	5	1	430	12
Total Firm A	495	10	99	3	89	2	11	1	694	16
Proportion of membership (per cent)	71.3		14.3		12.8		1.6		100	

union and, in most cases, they met management in pairs. Members did not complain about any difficulty in getting in touch with shop stewards. In fact, they usually had the possibility of choosing the shop steward whom they wished to defend their case.

There were six shop stewards representing 136 manual workers on the night-shift in the machine shops. One of them represented EETPU members, three represented the 94 TGWU members, and the other two held credentials of the GMWU. The reason for the comparatively small size of the constituencies there was that it was the only area where the two general unions had to live together. Since there was no cross-representation according to this pattern of organisation, they had parallel representation. As on the other shift, there was no constituency system and the shop stewards represented the members of their own union regardless of the department in which they worked.

In contrast, there were only four GMWU shop stewards elected by the 239 members working on different shifts in the foundry. In this case, the number of shop stewards was not really sufficient to provide for adequate representation. For instance, during our fieldwork only one steward worked in a large area covering four shops in which about 120 members were employed on three different shifts. The four foundry shop stewards were therefore a small minority within the joint shop stewards' committee (JSSC), a body comprising all the shop stewards in the company. During our period of observation, moreover, none of the foundry shop stewards was a leader. Hence, Factory I was certainly the weakest link in the domestic union organisation.

A major consequence of the pattern of shop steward representation presented here was that while dominant occupational groups were adequately represented, others had no shop steward coming from their ranks. Hence, of the nine shop stewards at Factory II, eight were machinists (out of a group

of 128) and only one was an operator (although there were 112), the operators earning much less than the largest group of machine operatives. There was no female shop steward, although many women were employed as operators or indirect workers. In fact, none of the stewards of this factory came from the ranks of indirect labour, who received the lowest basic rates and, by far, the lowest earnings. There were no less than 98 indirect workers at Factory II, and they were employed as viewers, packers, storemen, HGV drivers, fork-lift drivers, and labourers.

The GMWU, the TGWU and the AUEW had a senior shop steward recognised by the company, although none of them was a full-time shop steward. Nevertheless, the GMWU convenor, who was involved in both plants, spent a substantial proportion of his time on union duties. Over a sample period of four weeks in April, June, August and October 1978, the other shop stewards spent an average one-third of their time on union duties and were at their work station for 66 per cent of their 'clocked hours'. There were, however, important fluctuations, time-off for union business varying between 43, 39, 5 (August), and 54 per cent of all hours over these weeks. Interestingly, over the same period the night-shift shop stewards spent 47 per cent of their time on union duties compared with only 16 per cent for those on days. The main reason for this was that stewards on nights frequently had to attend meetings during the day.[4] The proportion of time on union duties was not related to the size of the constituencies.

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4. The arrangement was rather generous in such circumstances. The shop stewards were then off work the preceding night, as well as the night following the meeting if the meeting ended after lunch. In the latter case, stewards were paid for 20 hours of union duties.

2. FIRM B

2.1 Composition of the Labour Force

A first observation, to be analysed with reference to the appropriate background in the following chapter, is that the labour force had been severely reduced over a period of about fifteen years. Various documents indicate that, over this period, employment had declined by about 900, down to 1,250 at the beginning of our fieldwork in 1979. Of the 1,250, 829 were manual workers and about 350 white-collar employees.[5] Looking at the composition of the labour force at the time of the research, one noted the rather high ratio of white-collar employees in relation to the workforce as a whole. Manual workers represented 70.3 per cent of the employees compared with 86.2 per cent at Firm A. We do not know of any general norm in this respect, except for two comparative studies with rather small samples (Dubois, 1980; Maurice, Sorge and Warner, 1980). With reference to these studies, and considering the technology used, it would appear that the staff complement was rather high at Firm B, without necessarily being exceptional.[6] This was nevertheless a major theme of criticism from manual workers' representatives who argued bluntly that there were too many managers and non-manual employees for the number of 'directly productive workers'. They saw it as evidence of mismanagement. Senior managers also felt that the proportion of staff employees was rather high, but they provided reasons to

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5. This distribution excludes middle and senior managers as well as a group of 25 apprentices.

6. From their comparison of nine factories in three countries, Maurice et al. reported that 'in every branch of technology, Germany clearly has the largest works component. Britain comes second except in large batch/mass production, and France usually has the smallest works' (1980:66). For the type of technology roughly comparable to our cases (large batch/mass production), the works' share of total personnel was 88.0 per cent in Germany, 76.0 per cent in France and 72.4 per cent in Britain.

explain the situation.

The first line of explanation suggested by management was the complexity of the business, which dealt with a large range of products in different product markets. The Heat Transfer Division (HTD), in particular, required a relatively high component of research and development. Also, the organisation in four divisions (since 1976) probably led to uneconomical use of administrative and clerical resources. In short, for objective reasons mentioned in Chapter 2, there were difficulties in managing the enterprise. Secondly, the gradual decline of the labour force through redundancies had the effect of distorting the ratio of white-collar employees in relation to manual labour, mainly because of the need to safe-guard the infrastructure of the firm. At an information meeting we attended in August 1979, a shop steward pointed out that manual workers were again affected more severely than the staff by a programme of voluntary redundancies in HTD. Essentially, the managing director replied: 'a dilemma to the Company was that when the order book was low it was the time to concentrate on sales and related engineering activities to plan for the future and thus cuts in staff were not as savage as the current market would suggest'.[7] In fact, we have some information that there were drastic cuts in white-collar as well as in manual jobs in 1980 and 1981, as part of the major restructuring operation which followed the purchase of the factory by another engineering group.

At another level of analysis, and looking now exclusively at the composition of the manual workforce, there were also major differences between the two case studies. Of the 829 manual workers at Firm B, 49 per

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7. 'Notes of site information meeting held on Thursday 23 August 1979', p. 2. Minutes taken by a management representative.

cent were production workers, 24 per cent were classified as skilled workers, and 27 per cent worked as indirect labour.[8] At Firm A, 60.5 per cent of the manual employees were production workers, with 21 per cent of skilled operatives and 18.5 per cent of indirect workers. Obviously, there are difficulties in establishing such a classification, but these should not be exaggerated provided the same criteria are applied. Also, the differences may be partly accounted for by the distinct (although quite comparable) technology used. For instance, because of the importance of presswork at Firm B, there was a need for a larger toolroom. But this would not help to explain the higher ratio of indirect labour in the same factory. We are inclined to consider another line of explanation.

In this connection it is relevant to refer to an important study by Dubois and Monjardet on the division of labour in four British factories coupled with seven French factories in the clothing, food, chemical, and glass-fibre industries (Dubois and Monjardet, 1979; Dubois 1980 and 1982). Their main object of study was the influence of union action on work organisation. A major conclusion was that, mainly as a result of stronger workplace unionism, manning levels appeared to be generally higher in Britain (Dubois, 1980). Among manual workers this was noticeable in two ways. First, a higher proportion of the British manual workforce was employed in the ancillary shops ('service fonctionnels'), these providing a service to the shops on direct production. Secondly, even within those shops undertaking direct production ('les ateliers de production'), there was a higher ratio of ancillary workers in British factories. The main explanatory factor put forward by Dubois was the decomposition of labour. This concept

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8. This classification follows closely that of Batstone et al. (1977:XV). In short, indirect workers are those 'not directly involved in production tasks' and not classified as skilled labour (e.g. storemen, fork-lift drivers, labourers).

refers to the distinction between the main types of task, i.e. setting, direct production, quality control, maintenance, and internal transport.[9] Mainly because of union strength, British workers enforced a stricter demarcation between these types of task. The researchers also observed more worker resistance to labour mobility between the shops and to intensification of effort in the same country (Dubois, 1980).

At this stage, it seems reasonable to suggest that the higher ratio of skilled operatives and indirect labour at Firm B may also be indicative of a stronger decomposition of labour. This, in itself,may be a manifestation of union strength and job control. That is a question worth pursuing.

2.2 The Shop-Floor Organisation

All the manual workers of this factory were members of one of the five recognised unions. The TGWU represented approximately 595 employees (72 per cent of all members) and the AUEW had about 155 members (19 per cent). The three other unions had a much smaller membership, and each had one accredited shop steward. While the TGWU applied a post-entry closed shop, the AUEW (in the toolroom) and the NUSMW enforced a pre-entry closed shop.

The stronghold of the TGWU organisation was in the press shops and other sections related to presswork. Almost all manual workers assigned to these areas were members of the majority union. Indeed, apart from the toolroom representative, all the shop stewards working in the Presswork Division had TGWU credentials. In contrast, there was multiple unionism

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9. This notion of decomposition of labour was defined as follows: 'Par tâches fondamentales, nous entendons l'opération sur le produit, le contrôle du produit ou de la machine, la manutention, le réglage, ou l'entretien des machines. Ces tâches peuvent être distribuées à des postes différents ou concentrées sur un seul poste' (Dubois, 1978:175). The decomposition of labour is one of the two main aspects of the technical division of labour, the other being task fragmentation ('parcellisation du travail').

and shop steward cross-representation in most areas of the Heat Transfer Division. The TGWU, the AUEW, and the National Society of Metal Mechanics (NSMM), in this order, shared the membership.

The strength of the AUEW was in the toolroom. It was a 'one union shop' and this cohesive group of craftsmen controlled the politics of the union, which also represented other skilled and production workers in the factory. The area of the tinsmiths was also a 'one union shop' and these 39 skilled production workers were the only members of the NUSMW there. The NSMM membership had declined to about 35. This union had previously organised an important group of skilled production workers, the polishers. This department was phased down and finally closed during the 1970s. Their membership was now scattered throughout the factory. Finally, the fifth union, the EETPU, represented about half of the eighteen electricians, the others being members of either the AUEW or the TGWU.

In 1979 there were forty-two TGWU and five AUEW shop stewards, out of a total of fifty accredited stewards in the factory. Hence the average constituency size was a low figure of seventeen members. Two obvious factors contributed to this. First, the minute books of the TGWU shop stewards committee show that the number of TGWU stewards remained very stable over the seventies, in spite of the decline in membership. Indeed, the number of TGWU shop stewards was exactly the same in December 1970. This suggests that size was not a major determinant of what represented a separate constituency. A second factor was that, until very recently, management did not intervene on such an issue, on the grounds that it was a matter for the trade unions. At the time of our observation, however, management felt that the pattern of shop steward representation was rather odd and that there were too many stewards in some areas. The personnel department raised the issue in the context of the 1980 annual negotiations.

A document sent to the joint shop stewards committee (JSSC) states:

> It should also be the aim of the Company and the Unions to jointly agree on a reduced number of representatives (i.e. to amalgamate areas of representation). This is not designed to cut across Union power or to be in any way detrimental . . . And history is important here too - if a section reduces through time to only a few employees, then it cannot be sensible for them to retain a representative in his own right.[10]

In fact, there was wide variation in the size of the various shop steward constituencies. For instance, there was only one shop steward representing the 93 toolmakers, and only one TGWU steward for the 43 workers in the Heating Division. In contrast, there were two shop stewards elected by the eight toolsetters of Press shop no. 4, each of them working with half of the group, according to the alternate day- and night-shift (which was rotating every four weeks).

In presenting the contours of this shop-floor organisation, it should be noted that the shop stewards were by no means the only manual workers' representatives in this factory. Overall, there was a deputy shop steward in about half of the constituencies. The latter were involved in shop-floor bargaining, usually in support of the accredited shop steward but often on their own, in larger sections. Moreover, in at least four large constituencies there were elected shop committees of more than two members. For instance, the toolroom shop committee consisted of six members (one of them being deputy shop steward) and the shop steward. All of them were elected annually, usually with opposing candidates, and they regularly met the shop management as a group for bargaining and consultation. Another strong committee was that of the tinsmiths, composed of the shop steward, the shop chairman and three committee members, all elected at the annual shop meeting of the NUSMW. Hence, in most large shop steward con-

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10. Document entitled '1980 Hourly Paid Negotiations', written by the personnel director, 20 December 1979, p. 4, section 4c.

stituencies, the shop steward was not the only elected workers' representative. This means that there was even more depth within the organisation than the small average size of the constituencies would suggest. This may be seen as evidence of the extensive nature of the workers' organisation studied.

However, the factors discussed so far do not reach the heart of the explanation for the very large number of shop stewards and the determination of shop steward constituencies. The fundamental reason has to do with the pattern of shop steward representation at Firm B. As is usual in well organised engineering factories, the power basis of the shop stewards was the section, 'the basic unit of union organisation' (Batstone, Boraston and Frenkel, 1977:135). He or she was the delegate or the leader of a group of employees performing closely related operations, usually within a single shop. Looking at it more closely, however, it could be seen that shop steward constituencies were defined even more closely. There were often many constituencies within a single shop. In fact, what was meant by a shop steward 'section' in this factory could be understood by referring to the concept of decomposition of labour, which was introduced in the preceding section. The shop steward was the elected representative of a group of workers performing a specific type of task, usually within the same shop and on the same shift. The pattern of shop steward representation was based upon the distinction between different types of task. The constituencies were not defined on the basis of size of union membership; they followed the contours of the division of labour.

This may be illustrated by describing the shop steward organisation in relation to the work process of Press shop no. 3. The union organisation developed along the distinction between the five types of task mentioned earlier. Obviously, one could find several occupational groups within the same type of task, and each group would tend to elect its own shop steward.

Press operators were the largest group of production workers. There were 35 on each of the two rotating shifts, and each shift elected a shop steward and a deputy shop steward. There were also two smaller groups of direct production workers: those doing 'reclaim' work (eight of them in Press shop no. 3) and the 'scrap balers' (four of them in this shop and seven in the shop steward constituency). Each of these elected a shop steward and a deputy. The second type of task was performed by the tool-setters. There were about twelve on each shift, and each of these two groups elected one shop steward. A third type of task dealt with quality control. The table inspectors and the patrol inspectors were represented by one shop steward, while the viewers, who were in a lower job classification, elected their own shop steward. There were two important groups of craftsmen involved in different aspects of maintenance. The toolmakers were concerned with the making and the repairing of the tools. We noted earlier how they were strongly organised. Also, the maintenance fitters and the electricians were regularly involved in the maintenance of the presses, in accordance with the rules of their respective trades. Each of these were also represented by a different shop steward. The fifth type of task in the work process of Press shop no. 3 was internal transport. The fork-lift drivers working there were within the constituency of a TGWU shop steward representing all fork-lift drivers in the factory.

It may be noted that those working on quality control, maintenance, and transport were not assigned specifically to Press shop no. 3. Nevertheless, many of these employees took part in the work process there on a continuous or very regular basis. Our intention was to show that, on every shift, the members of not less than ten shop steward constituencies were or might be directly involved in the work process of this single shop. And their shop steward would be most likely to intervene if there was something really

contentious regarding work relations there. Such a pattern of shop steward representation obviously had many implications for job demarcations and job control more generally, many of which will be dealt with at a later stage.

One could also object that the situation prevailing in Press shop no. 3 was not typical, considering that this was a rather large shop in which the division of labour was quite sophisticated. In fact, although the number of shop stewards involved in many other shops was much smaller, this did not appear to be related to a different pattern of shop steward representation but mainly to a less extensive decomposition of labour. Hence there was only one shop steward representing the 93 toolmakers, and the bulk of production and indirect labour working in Fitting and Welding no. 2 and the Copper Core section also had only one representative for each shop, in spite of multi-unionism. In all these workshops, manual labour were performing various tasks and operations, but the jobs were not divided according to the functions of setting, production and quality control, and almost all the employees in the shop were in the same job classification.

3. CONCLUSION

It was stressed that there were many similarities in the organisational and institutional features of the enterprises under study. Nerverthe-less, a major theme of this study is the marked contrast in the way work relations developed in these two cases. This observation fits particularly well to the subject of shop-floor organisations. Hence, in both cases, all manual workers were members of trade unions who benefited from union security (closed shop and check-off arrangements). Shop stewards and senior shop stewards were recognised, were in regular contact with production and

labour managers, and were offered the usual facilities to represent their union basis. Yet, these two workers' organisations did not have the same impact at all on social relationships at the point of production. Indeed, even before the institutional reforms took place, the shop-floor organisation at Firm B showed a strength and character which never existed in the other engineering firm. While the reasons for such a contrast between the two workers' organisations remain complex, it is relevant to point to some of the determinants of their relative strength.

The first is the long standing of the craft unions at Firm B. This factory is located in Coventry, a district with a high concentration in engineering and a reputation for robust workplace union organisations. There were many indications that the AUEW, the NUSMW and the NSMM had established a long tradition of craft control, and this for quite a long time. At a later stage, in the 1960s, the press shop workers were mobilised on issues related to the effort bargain, under the leadership of progressive shop stewards. The TGWU, and especially the press operators' shop stewards, then took the lead within the shop steward organisation. By the late 1960s, the press operators had imposed an appreciable degree of control over many aspects of their work. At the time of the research, the phase of militancy had been over for some years, and the shop-floor organisation as a whole was on the defensive. Nevertheless, the institutional basis of the workers' organisation as well as the progress made with regard to control over the work process were solidly established. There was no indication of such developments at Firm A. The latter had developed as a family-owned firm, which was non-federated, and the growth of an independent union organisation had come at a later stage.

Secondly, we documented in some detail the composition of the workforce in both cases. It was shown that there was much less continuity of employ-

ment at Firm A, especially in the foundry. In fact, there were different patterns of employment in the two factories, with no labour mobility and very little communication between the ethnic communities. The union organisation was particularly weak in the foundry, with only four shop stewards representing 240 employees. The majority of immigrant workers in this factory were little involved in union activities. Their social relations at work were based more on ethnic groups than on work group composition, and these relations were not related to the shop steward organisation. Consequently, there was little organised resistance to management but only very sporadic upsurges of discontent.

A third explanatory factor, to which a great deal of attention was given in the preceding sector, is the pattern of shop steward representation. At Firm A, the shop stewards represented the members of their union, irrespective of the workers' position in the work process. The shop steward system of the other firm followed closely the decomposition of labour. While cross-representation was not consistent with the pattern prevailing at Firm A, it was very natural in the second pattern. Although we found little published material on this specific aspect, the pattern of shop steward representation at Firm B is thought to be more typical of the shop steward organisations in the engineering industry. And it certainly contributed to a stronger shop-floor organisation.

It is also expected that such an organisation based on the section level (Firm B) might be more appropriate for the development and protection of job control. It provided a basis for the identification of common (though sectional) interests and for the application of collective sanctions at the point of production. Essentially, the value of such a system was the way it related to workers' specific contributions to the work process. On the other hand, such a system, following the lines of the division of

labour, might be more liable to generate sectionalism. But in any case, the actual impact of sectionalism on job control, as well as on trade union power more generally, will have to be studied carefully.

If the shop-floor organisation at Firm B was somewhat characterised by sectionalism, segmentation was a major feature of the collective organisation in the other firm. While the workers' organisation at Firm A was not so closely tied to the division of labour, it nevertheless reproduced other lines of division within the workforce. Each union organised a particular segment of the workforce. In Factory II, relations had always been difficult between the GMWU and the TGWU, each having its basis in one of the two (non-rotating) shifts. Although they were of the same domestic union organisation, there was almost no communication between union members of the two plants, except for shop stewards sitting on the single JSSC. In the foundry, the high instability of labour was pointed out as a major cause for the lack of labour cohesiveness. Hence it is in this context of a segmented labour force working in integrated work processes that management strategy for the development of the labour relations institutions will be studied in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4

THE PROCESS OF INSTITUTIONALISATION

This chapter deals with changes in labour relations institutions. The concept of the institutionalisation of labour relations refers to the development of procedures and mechanisms for regulating conflict over work relations. In British workplaces, this social process was instigated mainly by management which sought to structure and centralise labour relations at the place of work. It consisted, in fact, of a reinforcement of the structure of joint regulation at the factory or company level.

In the cases studied, changes in the institutional framework have been so striking over the last decade that it is interesting to research into their impact on control in the workplace. Such a process must be studied over a significant period of time. Although the observation was carried out at the end of the 1970s, it is nevertheless possible, using various sources, to pursue these developments over a period of about ten years in both cases. The first section of this chapter deals with developments which occurred at Firm A from the early 1970s until the first months of 1980. The second section, a study of the reforms at Firm B, covers the period from the late 1960s to the sale of the company in August 1980. A third section puts forward a comparison of the patterns observed in the two firms.

1. INSTITUTIONAL REFORM AT FIRM A

1.1 Labour Relations Problems and CIR Recommendations

The reference to the Commission on Industrial Relations for an investigation in August 1972 was in itself indicative of the labour relations problems faced by the company. Indeed, the Commission reported major defects in the conduct of labour relations in both plants. One of the most

fundamental problem areas was the payment systems. The large group of machine operatives was producing under a piecework scheme which had been in existence for about twenty years at the time of the Commission's report in 1973. The CIR observed that

> the absence of proper work measurement and effective monitoring by management encourages the growth of shop-floor bargaining in a piecemeal manner as settlement on one job upsets existing differentials with others, creating pressure for adjustments to restore them. (para 63)

It also found that variation in piecework earnings for different jobs in the machine shops was considerable and that 'employees are dissatisfied with unexplained earnings differentials; management is dissatisfied with wage drift and its effect on costs' (para 67).

Although the Commission found a large number of different basic rates for skilled workers (fifteen at Factory II and ten at Factory I), the payment systems covering the production workers in the foundry were the most striking for their fragmentation and complexity:

> Semi-skilled employees who form the majority at the foundry are paid a basic rate plus incentive payments of various kinds. 14 different rates apply to the 130 men in this category and four rates to the 35 women. On top of this, 12 different incentive schemes apply to the men and four to the women. (para 69)

The whole system of remuneration was therefore in decay since fragmented bargaining generated friction between craftsmen and production workers about differentials. Consequently, there was little surprise in the finding of the Commission that 26 of the 29 recorded disputes during the period from December 1971 to December 1972 directly concerned pay (paras 73-76).

Inter-union rivalry was also seen as one of the major industrial relations difficulties for management. This tradition of rivalry, especially between the GMWU and the TGWU, was underlined in Chapter 3. The CIR considered the fact that the manual unions lacked any joint committee,

and negotiated separately with management, as a serious impediment on the development of an adequate framework to deal with labour relations.

It was typical of the general approach of the CIR that they put greatest emphasis on structural or institutional problems (Purcell, 1979a: 8). The Commission reported that its enquiries

> revealed a serious absence in the company of jointly-agreed and effective institutions and procedures through which industrial relations can be conducted. There is no joint negotiating machinery on which all the recognised unions are represented, the former joint consultative committee has lapsed and the existing disputes procedure covering the majority of works employees is not effective. (para 80)

A disputes procedure, including a status quo clause, had been jointly agreed by the company and the GMWU and the TGWU in March 1972. The CIR found that it was often ignored and short-circuited, however, sanctions being regularly applied before the procedure had been exhausted. Lack of authority on the part of foremen and superintendents also contributed to produce this type of situation. It was observed that 'employees are dissatisfied with their inability to get answers to complaints or grievances from junior management and some expressed the view that the only way to get management to take action was to "black" a job or threaten industrial action' (para 91). The personnel director also argued in interview that, in the early 1970s, inconsistent and uncoordinated decision-making by foremen and superintendents was a source of disputes.[1]

Between January 1969 and December 1971, the company experienced three strikes causing a total loss of about 3,900 working days of production (CIR, 1973:16). This could not be considered as a dramatic record. However, the CIR reported that the parties had been involved in a considerable number of disputes during 1972. Various sanctions, such as

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1. Interview, 21 December 1978. In 1972 he was personnel and industrial relations manager.

overtime bans, work-to-rules and blacking, had disrupted production, especially during the protracted wage negotiation.

Labour relations problems were likely to affect the reliability of Firm A in supplying its customers. It was underlined that because of the company's position in the product market and the interdependence between the various operations, it was highly vulnerable to industrial action. Hence labour relations were seen as a serious problem because they contributed significantly to the poor financial record of the company. In this respect, it is worth noting that the firm reported its worst financial results of the decade in 1971 (losses corresponding to 8.3 per cent of the turnover) and 1972 (losses corresponding to 6.9 per cent of the turnover). It was also pointed out that production was very labour intensive. Company sources show that the cost of 'total wages and salaries' represented 53 per cent of the value of the turnover in 1977-8.

In line with the general approach of the Donovan Commission and the Commission on Industrial Relations, the CIR's recommendations for this company gave management the primary responsibility for the reform. It recommended a major revision of the payment systems, insisting 'that the main need is for a readily understandable payment system in the machine shop which relates effort, skill and pay in an agreed manner' (para 95). The Commission made few specific recommendations on this matter, however, apart from one advocating the establishment of a work study department.

The main body of recommendations was relevant to the need to reform the structure of labour relations. Hence it stressed that 'the parties' first priority must be the establishment of joint negotiating machinery for manual employees' (para 86). Purcell wrote that this usually was 'the central recommendation' of the CIR which 'appeared to have an almost standard list of recommendations' (1979a:7-8). The Commission also

suggested the setting up of a joint consultative machinery. The establishment of these procedures for joint regulation required some preliminary conditions with regard to union representation. Hence the CIR recommended the creation of a joint shop stewards' committee. It also encouraged a joint review of the disputes procedure, stressing the need for something more specific on the number of stages, the time limits, and the people to be involved at every stage (paras 89-92).

1.2 Changes in the Institutional Framework

During the period which followed the CIR inquiry, the manual workers went on strike on two occasions. The first involved the GMWU members of both plants and lasted about two weeks. The most important strike of the decade occurred in September 1974 when all the GMWU and TGWU members of both plants struck for three and a half weeks. The strike originated in a succession of minor disputes, one of them concerning a trade union claim for the payment of a few fork-lift drivers and packers who had been laid off. According to managers, the rank-and-file were applying 'restrictive practices'. The company adopted a very tough line and union resistance finally came to an end when the members voted overwhelmingly to return to work, without any concession on the part of the company, following the recommendation of their full-time officials.[2] Over the following years the impact of this strike on the attitudes of the parties and the balance of power was considerable. Indeed, the company did not experience any other strike involving a significant group of workers and lasting for more than one day until the strike by AUEW and EETPU members during our fieldwork in 1979. The situation was therefore favourable for management to take the lead and implement institutional reform.

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2. Formal interviews with industrial relations officer (18 November 1978), personnel director (21 December 1978), and a group of three shop stewards (15 January 1979).

The negotiation of major changes in the machinery of labour relations proceeded at a steady pace from late 1974 until 1977. The first major step forward was the creation in 1974 of a joint shop stewards' committee (JSSC) consisting of all the manual shop stewards from both plants. Management insisted on the creation of this committee. Considering the long tradition of union rivalry, both sides accepted that this was an essential development if a more coherent labour relations framework was going to be established.

The central piece of regulation in this respect took the form of a comprehensive procedural agreement signed by the full-time officials and senior shop stewards of the four manual unions and management representatives in October 1975. This agreement defined the objectives, composition and procedures of a works council, which was the type of joint negotiating and consultative machinery recommended by the CIR. This works council was composed of five shop stewards (two GMWU representatives and one from each of the other unions) and management representatives. It has met regularly on a monthly basis since its inception in October 1975, under the chairmanship of the personnel director. A JSSC meeting was held regularly about one week prior to the works council meeting, and in practice the larger shop steward body gave a mandate to its representatives concerning each of the large number of issues on the agenda of the joint committee.

The content of the procedural agreement was not limited to the creation of the works council. It elaborated a four-stage grievance procedure, the works council being the final stage of the domestic procedure. It also contained a management rights and status quo clause which set the pattern of labour relations in these terms:

> The Unions recognize the Management's responsibility for efficient planning, organisation and management of the

> operations of the Company except insofar as this responsibility is qualified by the terms of this agreement.
>
> The Management agree to refrain from implementing Management decisions affecting employees until mutual agreement has been reached or the procedure laid down in this agreement is exhausted.[3]

In the meantime, the parties had reached an agreement on a new payment by results system for production workers. The principles and the terms of this scheme were defined in a 22-page agreement between the company and the GMWU, TGWU and AUEW. This payment system, which was still in operation at the time of the research, was based upon the determination of a 'standard minute value'. This crucial change in wage determination was dependent upon the introduction of work study on a large scale within the company. A great deal of this work measurement took place during 1974, and most of the production workers were operating under the scheme by July 1976.[4] It is worth underlining that the shop stewards were very involved in the painstaking task of negotiating the large number of standard times. As regards the procedure adopted:

> The value will be issued to the operator who will discuss it with his steward. The operator and a single steward will then discuss the value with the Work Study Engineer and present specific reasons if the value is rejected. . . . A Joint Shop Stewards Committee will be held on 24th November for the specific purpose of ratifying the values issued. Subsequently there will be a Works Council meeting concerning the same subject.[5]

Another major step forward in the institutionalisation of labour relations was the annual negotiation of a comprehensive pay settlement

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3. Procedural agreement, October 1975, section one.

4. It is interesting to note that between the very fragmented piecework schemes referred to earlier and the implementation of this scheme, they operated for a short period under a scheme called 'average earnings system'. Efforts were then made by management to reduce wage drift and regain some control over remuneration; it was a type of 'agreed daywork'. It did not significantly reduce fragmented bargaining and the number of anomalies and 'red circle' jobs. More importantly for management, it considerably reduced productivity.

5. Minutes of the works council meeting, November 1975.

covering all the manual workers of both plants. Having jointly established a comprehensive wage structure, they negotiated annually an increase on the basic rates. But the range of bargaining was much broader and, for instance, the 1978 collective agreement covered issues such as premium rates (for shift and overtime work), the payment by results system, payment of apprentices, lay-off pay, holidays (duration and payment), regulations on overtime, and flexibility of labour.

It is interesting to point out that while management would have preferred to conduct these annual negotiations with the five senior delegates on the works council (in conformity with the 1975 procedural agreement), so far it was forced to negotiate with the sixteen members of the JSSC. The shop stewards resisted such a delegation of their powers to a more central shop steward body for the negotiation of pay and fringe benefits. This was an instance of resistance to institutionalisation. The forces of sectionalism and the diverging interests between different segments of the workforce also contributed to the development of a trend which went against centralisation and institutionalisation. This process will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Attention has been concentrated on the most important developments in joint regulation. On many issues, however, management felt that it could elaborate its policies unilaterally, without involving the lengthy process of bargaining with a more or less coordinated trade union body. For instance, the company personnel department issued some policy statements on health and safety (May 1975), training (January 1976), internal recruitment (June 1977), and discipline (early 1977). On the last issue, the preamble of the 'code of conduct', which became an integral part of the individual contract of employment, says that 'the Company has now brought together its policies and procedures concerning discipline at work

and developed an overall disciplinary policy . . . this policy merely represents the best practices already established in our plants'.[6] A four-stage procedure was established for the application of disciplinary action: the foremen could not apply any of the formal disciplinary sanctions, and suspension and dismissal could only be imposed by two directors including the personnel director.

Another area in which labour relations became more formalised during this period is union security and facilities for shop stewards. One of management's priorities in this matter was the agreement on the respective spheres of union representation (i.e. unions' jurisdiction). They had discussed the issue at the works council from the August 1976 meeting, and they finally reached an agreement as part of the 1978 collective agreement. In order to achieve such an agreement, management was prepared to formalise the post-entry closed shop.[7] Hence the agreement stipulates that 'all parties agree that post entry Union Membership Agreements will become a condition of employment when a sphere of influence agreement is agreed'.[8] In 1973, only GMWU members were paying their subscriptions by check-off. At the time of the fieldwork, only the TGWU members were refusing these facilities offered by the company.

The CIR reported in 1973 that no serious problems had arisen on the question of facilities for shop stewards (para 34). Nevertheless, the parties to the 1975 procedural agreement formalised their relations on these matters, following the pattern in the industry. The question of payment for shop stewards and safety representatives, however, had been a

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6. Management document, 1977.

7. An informal post-entry closed shop had previously been implemented by the unions on a more or less strict basis.

8. 1978 collective agreement, section three.

subject of contention for years.[9] During this protracted period of negotiation, they had three works conferences on this matter, the last one in December 1979 on the basis of a management 'draft agreement', without reaching an agreement. It should be pointed out, however, that most shop stewards and rank-and-file felt that management behaviour was generally fair on this matter.

In many respects the structural reform has therefore been carried out along the lines of the CIR recommendations. However, it should be stressed that negotiation about the structural framework remains a continuous process: it is never finally stabilised. Hence, in June 1979 management submitted a document to the shop stewards entitled 'Proposals for streamlining procedure agreement'. It pointed out that the role of the works council 'has been usurped by the JSSC'. Management argued that 'the taking up of a role by the JSSC for which it was not designed has down-graded the functions of the works council, and created a negotiating body (the JSSC) which is incompatible with speedy resolution of grievances'.[10] This dissatisfaction was shared by the AUEW and the EETPU because these two unions representing the skilled workers were regularly outvoted on the JSSC. A works conference involving management and the skilled unions was held specifically to discuss this matter in November 1979.

These events do not mean that management had modified its strategy with regard to the institutional framework: it was rather aiming at going further. Hence management wished to strengthen the position of the senior shop stewards (an objective shared by management at Firm B) and to reinforce the autonomy of the union representatives on the works council (in their relations with the broad JSSC), in order to negotiate with such a central

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9. It had been on the agenda of the works council from October 1976 to the last meeting we attended in December 1979.

10. Management document, June 1979, p. 1.

shop steward body.

It is important to stress that the whole structure of labour relations was developed at the level of the company. As regards labour relations institutions, the two factories were totally integrated. There were practical reasons for this, but it was also indicative of management's labour relations strategies. First, as was described in Chapter 2, the work process of the two factories was highly integrated, from core-making in the foundry to final grinding and packing in the machine shops. Considering that they could not accumulate a stock of castings from the foundry, and that they operated under tight schedules of production, the continuity of production was crucial. And the pouring tracks of the foundry were probably the area most sensitive to industrial action. There was therefore a built-in process towards work discipline, and the task of monitoring the relations of production could be better pursued for the company as a whole.

A second factor worth considering here is the segmentation within the workforce, which was stressed in Chapter 3. The workers' communities of the two factories were distant. Workers were divided in relation to their contribution to the work process, and this division was exacerbated by stratification on ethnic grounds. The formal unification within a single domestic union organisation and the grouping of all shop stewards within the JSSC could not really hide, or even attenuate, the effects of these objective sources of division. Therefore, in a context where a highly segmented workforce was involved in a highly integrated work process, the centralisation of labour relations at company level certainly was sound managerial strategy.

2. INSTITUTIONAL REFORM AT FIRM B

2.1 Labour Relations Crisis

In order to understand the developments of the last decade, it is necessary to look back to the labour relations context of the sixties. In the early 1960s, the Canley factory was similar to what has been observed in 1979-80. However, during the sixties a much larger workforce was employed in this factory, which was then producing almost exclusively for the motor industry. The production was centred upon presswork, the main activity in shops no. 1, no. 3 and no. 4. There were also two other strategic groups of skilled production workers, i.e. the tinsmiths and the NSMM members working in the polishing shop above Press shop no. 4.

By the mid-1960s, the expansion of the British motor industry had begun to falter as the industry was facing growing competition in overseas markets. Firm B, which was highly dependent upon these enterprises, began to face serious financial problems for which the parent group was showing great concern. Hence, in the 1967 Annual Report of the group, the chairman reported that the firm under study was

> badly hit both by the 1966 deflationary measures and by industrial unrest in the motor industry. These problems have persisted throughout 1967, with unpalatable effect on the company's operations. I am glad, however, to be able to report that this has to some extent been mitigated by successful efforts to increase efficiency. These efforts are being intensified.

There is some evidence that the group was following the activities of Firm B more closely over this period. Indeed, in its Annual Report for the period ending September 1970, the chairman of the group wrote, with reference to Firm B, that 'some two years ago a new management team was introduced with the objective of restoring profits to an acceptable level. A number of changes was necessary, and it was expected that to complete the programme would take about two years.'

Such a significant increase in efficiency could hardly be expected from the two large groups of skilled production workers to whom reference was made above. The market was rapidly shifting away from the production of these groups of craftsmen. Not only were they reluctant to accept technological innovation but they vigorously preserved a high degree of craft control. Both sections were operating under a traditional piecework scheme (with no stop-watch and no work measurement) and had collective control over speeding-up. The number of polishers declined drastically and this department was wound up in the mid-1970s. Of the 200 tinsmiths employed at Firm B in 1959, there were 37 jobs left when the fieldwork was conducted.

Consequently, the major improvements in productivity and profitability for which the new management team was mandated had to come from presswork. Attention had to focus on the large group of press operators who were then very central with regard to the work process and the company position in the product market. It was underlined in Chapter 2 that the work process of the press shops put great pressure on management control. It necessitated frequent reorganisation of the operations (e.g. assignment of labour, work allocation) and caused almost continual bargaining over piecework standards, which itself contributed to the development of a robust shop-floor organisation. There is strong evidence that during the late sixties the management resolutely tried to confront these problems. Two elements of this strategy can be pointed out.

First, there is some evidence that management favoured more authoritarian labour supervision. With the financial problems and more limited margins in their relations with their customers, management realised that some instances of job control, to some degree tolerable when they developed during the expansion period, now had to be resisted.

And getting rid of 'restrictive practices' could necessitate the use of disciplinary power. The management team of the late sixties (a period referred to as the 'old days') was perceived by most workers as autocratic. The following observation of the TGWU convener was corroborated by many workers we talked to:

> It was a very authoritarian management who didn't consult before. They implemented their policies and we had to fight back, to react when they were wrong. We were treated like second-class citizens, or rebels.[11]

In discussing the performance of the managing director who was brought in to increase efficiency in the late sixties, a production manager in the press shops observed that 'his aim was good, but he had one problem: he did not know how to handle the men. It developed into confrontation with the shop stewards.'[12]

The second change, which was more important in its implications, was the reform of the piecework scheme. In an effort to reduce piecework bargaining, management proposed to change the traditional system of money piecework to a standard time system based on work study. The new scheme, referred to as the 'press shops productivity deal', was supposed to limit piecework bargaining to a minimum, since money would only be negotiated on the occasion of periodical increases on the conversion factor. And these negotiations would involve shop stewards, not the operators. Management's objectives were to regain some control over piecework and to contain wage drift. Since a large proportion of all manual workers on daywork were then paid under a grading scale based on press operators' average piecework earnings (APE), any improvement in this respect would have a secondary effect in the stabilisation of labour costs. The proposal was rejected by the press operators. Management put

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11. Formal interview, 25 October 1979.

12. Formal interview, 7 May 1980.

it through formal procedure in late 1967 and it went to Central Conference at York.

In fact, the point of contention concerned the rate of effort and pay while a standard was in dispute. When there was a dispute on a piecework price, operators were paid on a daywork basis of 6s. per hour plus make-up. There is some evidence that this practice was imposed by the collective organisation in the early sixties. An entry of the TGWU press operators stewards' shift book for July 1962 reads:

> On Friday a lot of the lads were talking about stopping. I held a meeting tonight to get clear as to what we are actually doing. First 6/- to be earned in every operating hour, this doesn't include breaks. The go-slow is also used on all studies (this was voted for). I discovered that some operators earned more than 6/- last night and I warned them that if any more of this goes on I will name the men concerned.[13]

Nevertheless, in August or September 1963 management formally agreed to this procedure called the 'six bob agreement'. As it worked, the level of effort offered in such a situation often consisted in a go-slow, which forced management to concede prices which allowed for earnings well above average in engineering. The chairman of the Local Conference held in Coventry in October 1967 noted that

> it was part of the original agreement that the Company was entitled to receive from the operators normal working effort in return for this 6/- payment. As we know and as we have had cause to remind you on numerous occasions as a Union all too often, this means that if the operator wishes to extract a better price than is justified out of the Company, he merely sits back on the job and works it at 6/- an hour, hoping that eventually Management may be persuaded to improve the price even though no improve-

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13. Dated 9 July 1962; also quoted in Evans (1980:14).

> ment is really justified. That would be bad enough, but, of course, the man does not even give normally anything like 6/- worth of effort in return for the 6/- rate.[14]

Many formal interviews with production managers, work study engineers and shop stewards who were involved in the press shops in this period confirmed that the press operators were then applying extreme pressure on management. At times management reacted by excessive supervision, disciplinary action and, in a few cases, dismissals. This contributed further to antagonistic relationships at the point of production.

The issue of the new piecework scheme was taken to Central Conference by the company, and it was then referred back for factory settlement. In the meantime, the press shops' shop stewards mobilised against the proposed scheme. In a leaflet issued to press operators, the press shops' stewards argued:

> Why must we fight this attempt? At present we can usually get the prices we want, within reason. We don't have to kill ourselves working to the offered price, and we don't have to go outside the gate to fight the management. And we have been able to get wage rises, even during a wage freeze.[15]

The leaflet then took position against strike action, but for resistance to the new scheme in taking advantage of the control they had over their work. It went on: 'You may be told that the only way is to go on strike. . . . <u>This is just falling into the Company's trap</u>. The best way to fight is the traditional method of <u>working normally</u>. If the Company then tries

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14. Extract from the minutes of the Local Conference held on 25 October 1967. The chairman was director of the Coventry and District Engineering Employers' Association. The terms of reference were 'to discuss the operation of the present Press Shop incentive scheme and the Company's proposals for a suitable alternative system of payment'.

15. 'A Message From Your Stewards, Past and Present', undated. The leaflet was probably issued late in 1967.

to cut our wages to day rates, we will just have to work like day workers.' In spite of the operators' resistance, the company showed its determination to implement the new procedure for dealing with disputed jobs.

> But the men resented this, as did the unions, and so at a mass meeting it was decided to restrict earnings, i.e. to 'go-slow' in terms of piecework. Two men were then dismissed for insufficient effort. Since they had only been implementing joint union policy, the JSSC agreed that all employees should withdraw their labour. (Monk, 1969:38)[16]

After this strike had lasted nine days in January 1968, 'management offered to reinstate the dismissed men on condition that the unions would lift the go-slow'.

The parties finally agreed to a new press shop incentive scheme on 10 February 1968. The operators formally renounced the 6/- agreement. Clause 3.13 of the new agreement stipulated that 'it is the spirit and intention of Operating personnel and Management throughout this Agreement to maintain the traditional incentive level of production during negotiations'. However, in the context described here, it is not surprising that the application of the new piecework scheme, on which management had insisted so much, proved to be a nightmare (Evans, 1980:17-20).[17] The mechanisms relating to disputed jobs remained the focus of the struggle for control, the new scheme being seen by press operators and shop stewards as a challenge to the long-standing right to mutuality. In short, the implementation of the scheme in Press shops nos. 3 and 4, without the support

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16. Monk's account of these events was based on interviews with two shop stewards and the TGWU branch secretary, which were conducted in May 1969. This was done for an MA dissertation at Warwick.

17. Steve Evans had worked for seven years as a press operator in this factory, five of these as a TGWU shop steward, before writing an MA dissertation on labour relations at Firm B. I had the opportunity to discuss many questions raised in my dissertation with him, a friend with information and insight into labour relations.

of the operators, intensified conflict on the shop-floor.

Before studying the ultimate confrontation in the press shops (late in 1969), it is relevant to mention an important factor which was concomitant to this combative shop-floor resistance of the late sixties. A group of militant TGWU shop stewards was then taking the leadership in the press shops and, at a later stage, within the whole TGWU shop steward organisation. The basis of this group was in the permanent night-shift of the press shops. In these areas, labour discontent with management action was emphasised by poor communications within the domestic union organisation and little involvement with middle and senior management. This opposition group within the shop-floor organisation became active in 1968-9 in trying to get rid of the very moderate and 'management oriented' TGWU senior shop steward who was also chairman of the JSSC. In order to take control of the shop steward organisation, the militant group had to successfully oppose the TGWU convenor who retained the support of the representatives of the craft unions (AUEW, NUSMW and NSMM) on the JSSC.[18] In the transcript of an interview conducted by Monk in May 1969 with this former TGWU convenor who was under pressure one reads:

> There is a current attempt at character assassination, because of a group of left-wing militants on the night shift who are trying to get rid of the Convenor. He says he's fighting two battles all the time, against management and men. (Monk, 1969:7)

This finally led to the break-up of the JSSC following the dissension of press operators over two specific 'productivity measures' negotiated by the JSSC at factory level. By October 1969 the 'right-wing' convenor had

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18. For a comprehensive analysis of this episode, see Evans (1980:20-26).

lost the battle and the leader of the militant group was elected; the latter was still convenor at the end of our fieldwork.

So far, the context and the major issues of the labour relations crisis of the late sixties have been studied in some detail. It came to a point where a major clash was inevitable. A period of ten months up to 12 November 1969 could be classified as a running-up period to this ultimate confrontation. Table 4.1 provides an account of the nature of the issues resulting in stoppages, the scale of the disruption and its location. Such a high figure of recorded stoppages is indicative of very antagonistic relationships on the shop-floor. Our information shows that 25 of the 99 stoppages were of less than one hour's duration. Twenty-nine lasted between one and four hours, and 45 extended to more than four hours (many of them on more than one shift).[19] As management pointed out, 'it cannot be over emphasized that the effect of the disruption to production and therefore sales of the hours lost through stoppages is far more than the direct proportion of hours clocked'.[20]

Table 4.1 shows clearly that Press shop no. 1 was the most dramatically affected section, while the largest section (Press shop no. 3) was relatively free of these unofficial strikes (and surprisingly exempt from stoppages over the issue of standard quantity).[21] The table also shows that more than half of the stoppages (and 46 per cent of the production

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19. All these data are collected from a management document in which all stoppages were registered during this period of crisis. This important document, which provides detailed supporting information on many other aspects, is hereafter referred to as the Company dossier on industrial relations in the press shops, 1969-1970.

20. Introduction to the same document, p. 2.

21. One should not conclude, however, that there was a lack of solidarity and resistance in Press shop no. 3. These operators were involved in the largest number of cases of 'sympathy action' and also in eight out of the ten stoppages by more than one section.

TABLE 4.1

RECORDED STOPPAGES IN THE PRESS SHOPS, 12 JANUARY TO 12 NOVEMBER 1969
NATURE OF THE ISSUE, LOCATION OF THE DISPUTES, AND PRODUCTION HOURS LOST*

	Standard Quantity	Incentive Scheme (General)	Objection to Work Study	Operators Refusing to Go-Slow	Work Allocation	Issue about Trainee Setter	Issue about Gloves	Sympathy Action	Attend Meetings	Unspecified	Total
Press shop no. 1	33 (3590)		1 (54)	1 (15)	6 (487)		1 (32)	2 (350)	3 (34)	1 (7)	48 (4569)
Press shop no. 3								6 (477)	1 (24)		7 (501)
Press shop no. 4	6 (516)		1 (63)					4 (148)	3 (39)	1 (42)	15 (808)
Brake shoe section	13 (623)					4 (241)		1 (68)	1 (3)		19 (935)
More than one section	2 (327)	2 (920)					2 (1504)	3 (1323)	1 (29)		10 (4103)
Total	54 (5056)	2 (920)	2 (117)	1 (15)	6 (487)	4 (241)	3 (1536)	16 (2366)	9 (129)	2 (49)	99 (10,916)

*Total number of production hours lost (workers x hours). Figures in parentheses.

SOURCE: Data collected from Company dossier on industrial relations in the press shops, 1969-1970 (management document).

hours lost) originated in disputes over standard quantity. More generally, most issues leading to stoppages had to do with the effort bargain.

It was over such an issue that the six-week strike erupted on 12 November 1969 when seven men working on line 6 in Press shop no. 3 were 'sent home for refusing to work at traditional levels of incentive'.[22] During the following shifts, the press operators of the other shops and most TGWU members walked out in support. After unsuccessful attempts to find a compromise with management, 190 press operators decided to carry on the strike for an unlimited period.[23] The crisis had now reached its ultimate point, a rupture having the impact of what Purcell referred to as a 'trauma' (1979a:15).

Again, the central issue was the minimum level of output which could be tolerated while the piecework standard was in dispute. The operators were fighting for the 'right to work at standard' (i.e. 100R), a practice putting great pressure on management to come to terms with the operators. Beyond that, however, it was seen by many as a 'make or break' struggle between management and the press operators. It was also the acid test of the support for the 'left-wing' TGWU convenor who had just been elected. In this respect it should be borne in mind that the other unions did not give any support to what they referred to as an 'unofficial strike'.

The heavy costs of the strike on both sides forced them to resume production, management announcing that 'they were prepared to "turn a blind eye" to "working to standard" if they would return to work pending

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22. Company dossier on industrial relations, op. cit., p. 11.

23. The press operators of the Fabricated brake shoe section refused to carry on the struggle. Evans (1980:27) explains how it was agreed within the union ranks that ancillary workers (TGWU) should return to work, mainly for strategic reasons. Many of them were laid off.

a further works conference' (Evans, 1980:27). In the short term, the long strike had not resolved the labour relations crisis. The issue went through procedure on the basis of an employer's reference on the interpretation of clause 3.13 of the piecework scheme stipulating that operators should maintain 'the traditional incentive level of production' during negotiations concerning a disputed standard rate of production. It went up to York, where it was agreed to hold a Composite Conference at which national officials and domestic representatives of both sides were involved in trying to settle the dispute.[24] This conference, held on 10 March 1970, consisted of a very long session of negotiation between nine employers' representatives and twelve union representatives. The discussion, reported in 54 pages of proceedings, focused on crucial issues of shop-floor control, such as worker control over the pace of work and the lowest level of effort which may be tolerable while a piecework standard is in dispute. The parties finally reached an agreement stating that 'if the standard time offered is not accepted the operator will continue to perform the operation . . . at 135 R performance rating'.[25] The agreement also contained improvements on other aspects of the press shop incentive scheme, such as the conversion factor and payments for waiting time and work other than press operating. Even though any judgment on this matter is likely to be subjective, it is relevant to note that people interviewed, from both

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24. Hyman referred to this Composite Conference held at Firm B, as well as to the holiday claim put through procedure by the TGWU, in Disputes Procedure in Action (1972:126-8, 150). He defined a Composite Conference as 'a rare arrangement combining features of Works, Local and Central Conferences; it is held at the works, is attended by national and local Union and Employers' officials as well as domestic management and shop stewards, and is formally recorded' (1972:50). I am very grateful to Richard Hyman who sent me some documentary material he collected in connection with these disputes. He also provided many insights and thoughtful suggestions for improving this chapter, as well as others.

25. Quoted from the agreement reached at the Composite Conference and signed by shop stewards and senior managers on 15 April 1970.

sides, thought that the press operators had had the best of this trial of strength.

In the meantime, the press operators were still applying a range of sanctions. Hence, from the return to work late in December 1969 to the Composite Conference held on 10 March 1970, there were 22 stoppages.[26] Moreover, the TGWU went through formal procedure with a claim for payment of average earnings during holidays. This specific 'holiday claim' was studied by Hyman (1972:126-8). At the Works Conference, the chairman referred to the 'concern felt by the Company about the number of sanctions currently being applied generally and more specifically with regard to the written threat by the stewards to withdraw labour every Wednesday, (day and night shift) until the holiday claim was satisfied'.[27] In fact, the TGWU members followed up their written threat by taking strike action on Wednesdays in support of their claim. The issue went up to Central Conference where it was referred for domestic discussion, and eventually allowed to drop. Hyman concluded that this claim illustrated the 'tactical use of procedure'. Although it represented a genuine grievance,

> it appears that the reference entered procedure when it did as part of a strategy to exert maximum pressure while negotiations took place on the piecework agreement. Once the latter dispute was resolved at the Composite Conference - on terms which permitted a substantial increase in piece-work earnings - the impetus behind the claim was dissipated. (1972:128)

Nevertheless, the Composite Conference did not put an end to open conflict in this factory. According to management, 'the effect of the composite settlement was to make a complete round of wage negotiations

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26. Company dossier on industrial relations, op.cit., p. 1.

27. Minutes of the Works Conference held on 24 February 1970, p. 2. This written threat of industrial action, a typewritten document, was signed by the TGWU convenor on 12 February 1970.

necessary'.[28] This led to many stoppages by skilled and indirect workers, some of which forced lay-offs of considerable scale. Hence, during the six-month period which followed the March settlement, management recorded 27 stoppages. The most important of these was the five-day strike by millwrights (maintenance) in April 1970, during which all the press operators and ancillary workers in the press shops were laid off.

Later in 1970 the managing director resigned (or was forced to do so) and his successor came from another of the group's subsidiaries. Indeed, in the 1970 Annual Report of the group it is revealed that the objective of increasing efficiency and profitability, which had been set three years earlier, had not been achieved. And this was pointed out as 'the major factor in the Group's lower profit last year'. The very future of Firm B was then considered and 'following certain changes and assurances, the Board has agreed that Firm B should continue in operation. Its future, however, must depend on the success of the combined efforts to place it on a profitable basis'.

In this section, we have documented the state of labour relations in this factory during the 1960s, especially in the large press shops. It was felt relevant to study this period in some detail, notably to show the extent of the crisis, before looking at the reform of labour relations and its actual impact. This was also presented as evidence of the strength of the shop-floor organisation and of the considerable degree of control the press operators had over their work. The following section looks more specifically at the substantial degree of job control established in the press shops before the institutional reform of labour relations occurred.

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28. Company dossier on industrial relations, op.cit., p. 1.

2.2 Job Control before the Reform

In fact, the empirical material presented so far shows the rather exceptional control the press shop workers had over the level of effort and the effort bargain more generally, and that is the heart of the struggle for control on the shop-floor. This section stresses how job control was widespread in the whole Presswork division and discusses some characteristics of the pattern of work relations which prevailed in the factory.

In the press shops, worker control over effort was made possible by the development of collective norms, enforced by collective discipline at the levels of work groups and sections. This social process often took the form of overt worker resistance, a situation in which the foremen and section managers were not powerful enough to withstand the pressure from the shop-floor. Indeed, on many issues these supervisors did not even have a say in the decision-making. The following instances of collective discipline in the enforcement of ceilings on earnings provide a good illustration of this. In a document signed by the divisional manager, it was reported that 'the union members in Press Shop 1 informed 6 members that they should not work on the afternoon of 17th August 1970 as a punishment for booking a higher standard than the shop floor agreed'. Here is the way such a decision was reached:

> On Thursday 13th August the men were prepared to work in line with the women with the proviso that the women restricted their earnings to 150 R.
>
> On Friday, the line comprising 3 men and 4 women produced work entitling them to 197% bonus.
>
> The Press Shop 1 Operators had a meeting in the morning of 17th August and recommended that 6 people on the line should lose half a shift by ceasing work at 12:30 p.m. . . .
>
> A meeting was held between the divisional manager and the steward for Press Shop 1 . . .
>
> Management stated that the type of restrictive action as proposed was completely against the current working

> agreement which is payment for performance achieved. The shop steward stated that he would address the shop at 12:15 p.m. with the view of rescinding the decision. At 12:25 p.m. he reported back that the decision should stand and the people concerned would go home at 12:30 p.m.[29]

A few days later, the deputy director of the Coventry employers' association wrote a letter to the TGWU district organiser in which he referred to the measure taken on 17 August 1970 and complained that 'this incident was repeated yesterday when nine men went home again on the instructions of other work mates who said they had produced too much work. I understand that on this occasion the stewards spoke to the section concerned, but that this did not prevent the action being taken'.[30] Again on 9 September 1970, 21 press operators took strike action for a complete shift in protest against six operators who exceeded a 150 per cent bonus ceiling and then refused to go home in compliance with the sanction imposed by the section.[31]

The documentary sources on this period show that although this type of shop-floor control focused on the effort bargain, it was also applied on a much wider range of issues. For instance, the introduction to the Company dossier on industrial relations in the press shops presents 'the main requests of management' in October 1970:

> b) There should be more mobility of employees without having an argument or dispute whenever an attempt is made to operate more effectively . . .

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29. Company dossier on industrial relations in the press shops, 1969-1970, Industrial relations diary of events, Issue 2, p. 2.

30. The employers' association representative added that 'this response from your members gives little hope that they appreciate the seriousness of the situation or that they intend to try to co-operate with the Management in putting things right. I would sincerely hope that you use your influence to try to prevent this sort of thing from re-occurring.' Letter dated 20 August 1970.

31. Company dossier on industrial relations, op.cit., Issue 3, pp. 5-6. The deputy director of the employers' association again wrote a letter to the union official with reference to this.

c) It should be possible to work overtime in those sections where it is necessary without having either an absolute ban imposed or a one in, all in, attitude adopted. . . .

d) It should be possible to introduce operating methods without facing a refusal backed by either a demarcation argument or a 'what is worth' attitude.

e) It should be possible to move materials and sometimes tools as required by the pressures of business without threats and without non co-operation.

Such a definition of management objectives over issues such as labour mobility, overtime distribution, changes in methods of production, and layout of equipment certainly is indicative of the range of worker controls achieved over the years.

The management's diary of events also indicates that such a degree of worker control had not developed only within the large group of press operators. For instance, there are reports of 'restrictive practices' by fork-lift drivers not allowing a new piece of equipment to be used in the toolroom (July 1970), and of the despatch workers refusing mobility between different sections (September 1970). In October 1970, another group of pieceworkers - the guillotine operators - stopped work because a work study engineer 'had stood by the operator for approximately ½ hr. without making his self known to the operator'. Their shop steward informed management that they 'were not having this particular Work Study Engineer on the section'. Being a 'fairly new employee', the work study engineer had not followed the proper procedure and

> Management took full responsibility for the Work Study Engineer action and stated that the man's actions will change immediately. The man was acting in ignorance of certain factory customs and practices. After discussion lasting 2 hours the TGWU agreed to accept the Work Study Engineer back on the section after a cooling off period of 4 days had elapsed. Management agreed to this.[32]

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32. Company dossier on industrial relations, op.cit., Issue 4, pp. 6-7.

The empirical material presented in this section and the preceding one has many implications as regards the state of labour relations at Firm B prior to the institutionalisation of labour relations. Our intention here was to document the range and degree of job control. In many ways, we found that workers were doing more than imposing restraints over the way their labour power was utilised by management - which is our operational definition of job control. On many crucial issues they were exercising a type of workshop control akin to self-government.

The evidence presented so far also draws attention to some peculiarities of the pattern of control which prevailed in this workplace, and most probably in many other engineering factories, under the 'informal system' of labour relations. To start with, the type of fragmented work process which predominated in this factory was conducive to sectional militancy. For instance, the non-automatic machines gave the press operators favourable conditions for imposing their control over the pace of their work. They also worked on production lines the composition of which had to change frequently because of small batches. This fostered cohesiveness within, as well as between, the work groups composing each section.

This shop-floor cohesiveness was most important because this type of contemporary job control was much more dependent upon social organisation at the point of production than traditional craft control. Job control at Firm B was related to the militancy of the shop steward organisation, especially in the press shops. But in fact the strength of the workers' organisation did not appear to come so much from the shop stewards themselves. It was more an instance of direct democracy, where decisions were taken by all constituents at the most decentralised level. In most cases the shop stewards were not the instigators of issues, and the evidence shows that they were frequently overruled by their section.

In this workplace there are indication that management at the time felt that the situation was out of its control. For instance, on the occasion of a formal interview in May 1980, the current managing director was asked about the most striking industrial relations problems when he arrived at this factory in 1972. He mentioned the 'anarchy which existed in the presswork piecework scheme, especially in Press shop no. 4'. He insisted that 'it was not so much that workers had too much power, it was that management did not have any power: the balance of power was dramatically distorted'. It was in this context that management, through the intermediary of the employers' association, made frequent appeals to the officials of the Transport and General Workers' Union, enjoining them to intervene and help restore 'normal labour relations'. In fact, the TGWU district organiser was frequently involved, and higher levels of the union hierarchy also took part in various joint meetings with the view to improving work-place relations in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Hence at a Local Conference held in October 1967 the chairman referred to 'a very big two-sided investigation done on the rash of unconstitutional strikes in the early part of last year, in which your Union co-operated fully in the shape of yourself [district organiser] and Mr. [regional secretary]'. There were also several full-time officials at the Composite Conference of March 1970, including one TGWU national officer. Apart from these joint meetings, we have already referred to letters from the Coventry and District Engineering Employers' Association to the TGWU district organiser, most often with reference to unconstitutional action being taken. We have got copies of many of these letters, mainly for the period August and September 1970. Writing to the TGWU district organiser on 17 September 1970, the deputy director of the local employers' association referred to six of these letters mailed between 25 August and 10 September, and

complained:

> Each of the above letters has dealt with an incident of unconstitutional action by your members, which illustrates the lack of co-operation which the Company felt was leading them into serious difficulties. No improvement seems to have been forthcoming in your members attitude at the Company, and I must protest that our approaches to you do not seem to produce any results.
> We have not received any replies to our letters . . .

In fact, it will be noted later in this chapter that the full-time officials of the TGWU and other unions represented at Firm B played a role in the establishment of the new industrial relations structures of the early 1970s.

But the position of the TGWU officials was problematic. On the one hand, they saw their members resorting frequently to unofficial and unconstitutional strikes, and many shop stewards were apparently seen by union officials as rebels with little concern for the formal engineering procedure. On these matters, however, the mediating role the union officials were asked to play by employers was obviously not an interesting one. Nevertheless, it seems that TGWU officials were genuinely concerned about the poor labour relations at Firm B, notably because they were worried about the effect of disputes occurring in this factory on employment in related engineering workplaces. Hence, during the six-week strike of 1969,

> at the weekly meeting at Transport House, the operators were made aware of the growing impact of their action on the motor industry. The convenor of the Standard Triumph Factory intervened to warn of the impending lay-offs of his members because of lack of components from the press shops.
> (Evans, 1980:27)

On the other hand, the TGWU full-time officials actually had little control over the activities of the rank-and-file in this factory. Clearly, this was an autonomous and robust shop-floor organisation. And indeed, too much intervention by the outside union in trying to change the relationships

between the domestic union and management would have exacerbated the critical attitude of many TGWU shop stewards and members towards full-time officials. Such a feeling, which appears to have developed during the period under discussion, could be observed in many ways during our field-work. In the late 1970s the TGWU district organiser had little influence on union policy at Firm B, while for the craft unions relations between outside officials and shop stewards were much closer.[33]

In the next section attention is focused on the recovery strategy adopted by the new management during the seventies, dealing first with the constraints which had to be considered in the elaboration of the reform policy.

2.3 Management Strategy for Recovery

Within the objective conditions which have been outlined so far in this chapter, it is argued that some courses of management action were precluded. Considering the very bad labour relations climate, any room for manoeuvre was rather limited.

The first constraint was the company position in the product market. In the early 1970s Firm B was almost totally dependent upon a single product market, i.e. components for the motor industry. The profit margin for presswork production was low and the delivery problems had badly affected the credibility of the firm with its customers.

Secondly, the parent group, which had to support the company's deficits for six consecutive years from 1969-70, was keeping a very close

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33. For instance, during the 1979 national engineering strike the full-time officials of the craft unions were very influential in getting their members' support, while the TGWU district organiser did not try to influence the membership to do so. The TGWU members refused to support the two-day strikes of September (Chapter 7). In interview with us, the TGWU district organiser, who had been the union's official representative at Firm B since 1959, pointed out the autonomy of the local union and sectional autonomy as the peculiarities of labour relations in this workplace. Formal interview, 12 December 1979.

eye on this factory, the new managing director reporting directly to the group's managing director. The option of a closure was considered but rejected mainly because of the anticipated consequences of such a drastic course of action for the entire business activities of the parent organisation within this industry. At that time, a closure would have halted the operations in part of the motor industry and the group could not have withstood the pressure from the large customers.[34] Moreover, as Evans has argued, 'the size of their assets tied up in the Company made closure too costly' (1980:30). Evans also pointed out that, before succeeding in 1980, the group failed to sell the factory in 1971, 1975 and 1978. Since Firm B was a risky business, if not the 'money loser' of the group, the credits available for capital investment or any costly reorganisation were very limited. This financial situation restricted management discretionary margins in two different ways. First, the option of technological innovation and work reorganisation in the press shops, which could have removed the basis for job control, was excluded whatever the feasibility of such a course of action. Second, the option of 'buying off trouble', a policy consisting of trying to secure worker commitment by a substantial increase in monetary compensation (including fringe benefits), was hardly more consistent with their market and financial situation.

Two other constraints upon management strategy need little explanation at this point. One (the third constraint) was the nature of the existing technology, which was likely to generate job control. For instance, the operators were working on machines which gave them a great deal of influence on the quantity produced and a relatively high degree of autonomy on the shop-floor. It is one of the main reasons why most

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34. Interview with the company's managing director, 13 May 1980.

production managers felt that the press shops could only be managed under piecework (this being in itself a constraint of some importance).

The fourth constraint was the relatively substantial degree of job control which had already developed in the press shops, as underlined in the preceding sections. Job control took the shape of limitations to management freedom of action at the point of production, and these limitations were protected by an autonomous and vigilant shop-floor organisation. These reasons suggest that the option of regaining control over work relations by authority and coercion, which would have involved a direct confrontation with the shop steward organisation, was not open to management. Indeed, the hard line had proved to be disastrous in the late sixties. But more than that, even if the conditions for such a radical course had been right, it was not consistent with the philosophy of the management team which was in command during the seventies. Their management style was characterised by a strong ideological commitment to consultation and involvement of workers' representatives in decision-making. To some extent this could be related to the fact that some influential managers had been associated with what is known as the 'Glacier school of management'. The managing director who took office in 1970 had previously been a director of the Glacier Metal Co. Ltd., which was part of the same industrial group. Over the following years, several top managers were brought in from the same factory located in Scotland. At the time of our fieldwork, the managing director (who had been at Firm B since 1972), another executive director, and the industrial relations manager had been associated with the 'Glacier school'. Two of the central tenets of this approach were a particular model of worker participation, based on a works council structure, and a change from piecework to timework (Brown, 1962; Brown and Jaques, 1965).

Having outlined some very serious constraints on management action, it

is now possible to analyse the strategy which was effectively adopted. It is useful to make a distinction between three aspects of this programme. These are the re-structuring of production, a greater control over labour costs, and a structural reform of labour relations, which is our main concern and the subject of section 2.4.

Around 1971-2 it was decided to reduce the importance of presswork within the company operations and to shift the emphasis to non-automatic heat transfer production. It appears that the board of the parent group was, to say the least, very much in agreement with this policy. In the section relating to Firm B, the 1972 Annual Report stated:

> During the past two years we have decided that its future growth lies mainly in the field of heat transfer technology, particularly industrial heat exchangers, space and process heating. The losses of the last two years basically represent the cost of setting up in these comparatively new fields and reorganising and concentrating the press work activities into those specialist areas where the Company has particular expertise.[35]

Evidence that the shop stewards seemed to have had some information about the future of the press shops is provided in the TGWU shop stewards committee Minutes books for the period 1971-3. For instance, at the meeting held on 11 September 1972 the convenor informed the stewards of a forecast of sales for the following years. The sales of presswork were to go down from £5 million in 1971-2, to £4.25 million in 1972-3, down to £3.75 million in 1973-4.[36] These developments were creating a feeling of

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35. 1972 Annual Report of the group, p. 13 (emphasis added).

36. During the same period of two years, the total turnover of the company was to increase from £8.85 million to £10.65 million. The convenor got this information from the site information meeting with the managing director.

insecurity among the workforce in the press shops.[37] Independently of the quality of this strategic decision, the way management proceeded affected relations with customers. They implemented dramatic price increases on many components without much discussion with the customers. Before the strategy produced the expected effect on orders (and jobs), some customers had to live with the increases before turning to an alternative supplier.[38]

Formal interviews indicate that the rationale for this strategic decision was primarily based on market considerations.[39] The market for industrial heat transfer seemed very bright in the early seventies. The directors of the group also wished to extend their range of activities and customers. Heat transfer production, with relatively low capital investment, offered promising possibilities in overseas markets (e.g. equipment for power stations in the Middle East). Second in importance as a causal factor was the poor state of labour relations in the presswork department. Worker resistance had come mainly from the press shops, where operators were working under piecework.

By 1976, the economic context had changed and it appeared that the assessment of the market potentials for heat transfer production had been over-optimistic, if not outright wrong. Market conditions had been reversed. Some workers in the Power plant heat transfer unit (PPHT) were made redundant. Others applied successfully for presswork jobs.[40] Indeed, when the current managing director was promoted to this job in 1976, it was decided to regenerate the production of presswork in the belief that

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37. In the TGWU shop stewards committee Minutes book for 1972 there are frequent references to the possible closure of Press shop no. 4.

38. Interviews with the personnel director (2 May 1980) and a production manager in presswork (7 May 1980).

39. Interviews with managing director (13 May 1980) and personnel director (2 May 1980).

40. TGWU shop stewards committee Minutes book, June and July 1976.

it represented financial stability for the firm. At the time of the field-work, the position of the Heat transfer division (HTD) had deteriorated to a subsistence level, while the demand for presswork was relatively high in spite of the deepening recession. A customer newsletter issued by Firm B in the autumn of 1979 focused on this reversal of fortunes, putting emphasis on the market successes of presswork. Looking back at the situation which existed when he took over this function four years before, the managing director was quoted as saying with reference to presswork:

> Although no-one had said specifically that the business was ending, there was an implication that it was being chopped. Our customers were actively engaged in re-sourcing their requirements, among them two big customers who represented 80 per cent of our turnover. There were indications of redundancy and the likely closure of one of the press shops and we had got as far as working out the costs of re-locating presses.[41]

One of the major consequences of this re-structuring of production in the early seventies, and the dramatic reversal in priorities that followed, is the gradual reduction of the workforce over the decade. There were redundancies in every year, with major programmes in 1971-2, 1975, 1979 (for HTD) and 1980.

The second aspect of management strategy was to pay greater attention to the control of the pay structure. Here is a management account of this:

> In 1973, the Company was pursuing a policy to rationalise the hourly rated wage structure. At that time there were

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41. Contact, customer newsletter, Issue no. 2, October 1979.

> approximately 150 different wage rates . . . The broad objective of the Company policy was to eliminate all non work study based piecework schemes and to structure all daywork payments into a Company pecking order.[42]

Much in line with the 'Glacier school' principles, management wanted to get away from piecework but could only reduce its impact in the factory. Hence the new production in heat transfer would be managed under a flat rate payment system. When work started in the Copper core section in the mid-seventies, for instance, it was conditional to a shop stewards' commitment that it would be on flat rate. Although the bulk of press operating had to stay on piecework because of the work process, part of this production was also put on agreed daywork in 1974.[43]

In addition, two important aspects of the reform of the pay structure were part of the 1974 agreement. First, it ended the system of average piecework earnings (APE), by which the earnings of 228 manual workers in 38 occupational groups were directly determined by the piecework earnings of the press operators.[44] Such a system was said to be inflationary and it was also unduly dependent on a piecework scheme characterised by fractional bargaining and wage drift. These groups, along with other dayworkers, were integrated within the flat rate wage structure, the second of the major modifications. The skilled and other

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42. Report and award of an ACAS arbitration between the NUSMW and the Company, August 1977, p. 2. This quotation is an excerpt from the managing director's evidence at the hearing. In another management document, dated January 1974, there is a listing of 119 occupational groups with 67 different rates of pay.

43. It applied to work on heavy components, mainly in Press shop no. 4. The results were rather disastrous for management, as will be shown in Chapter 7.

44. Management document dated 11 January 1974; see also Evans, 1980:32. This group included the 57 toolsetters, the inspectors, the storemen, and many smaller groups.

indirect workers were ranked in six grades of 'technical service operatives' (TSO) (mainly maintenance workers) and five grades of 'production service operatives' (PSO); there were three grades of production workers. This wage structure was in operation until 1980 when differential problems and claims for upgrading forced management to negotiate a new structure which further reduced the number of grades.

These changes were greatly facilitated by the reinforcement of the structure of labour relations. It is to this reform of labour relations institutions that attention is now directed.

2.4 Reforming the Structure of Labour Relations

The driving force behind labour relations reform in this factory was the need to regulate the antagonistic work relations described at length in the preceding sections. Management sought to institutionalise workers' representation so that responsible senior shop stewards could help contain sectional militancy. But there were also other institutional factors which may have given an impetus to the reform of workplace labour relations. Hence the Coventry employers' association was engaged in an effort to improve labour relations in this company, seeking to involve the full-time union officers in a joint approach on this matter. In addition, from the termination of the old engineering procedure in 1971 to the 1976 agreement, there was a vacuum in formal procedure (Clegg, 1979:86-9; Storey, 1980:42-4), and in federated firms this may have had some influence in fostering the development of domestic procedures and mechanisms to fill this gap.

As in the other firm, the first priority was put on the creation of a joint shop stewards' committee (JSSC). There was a tradition of union autonomy and rivalry (essentially between the general union and the minority craft unions). The JSSC had existed for only a few years when it

broke up in 1969. In 1970 the company hoped to involve the unions in rescue operations. A proposal to set up a working party 'to examine the problems facing the Company' could not be implemented because of the refusal of the TGWU convenor 'to join in any kind of meeting with the senior stewards of the other unions involved except as part of the Joint Shop Stewards Committee'.[45] The TGWU insisted on proportional representation on the JSSC and negotiating rights corresponding to its membership, while the other unions considered these demands unreasonable.[46]

In October 1970 the company publicly threatened to close down the factory, giving trade union rivalry as one of its major problems. This forced the calling of two joint union conferences involving national as well as local union officers, the second resulting in an agreement in January 1971.[47] The new JSSC was to be the representative body on factory-wide issues, each union retaining its autonomy on domestic matters. The compromise on representation within the committee meant that the five members of the minority unions (two AUEW shop stewards and one from each of the other unions) could not be outvoted by the five TGWU representatives.

Following the union withdrawal from the 1922 Engineering Procedure Agreement in 1971 after the failure to agree on the status quo procedure, negotiation was referred back to the domestic level. In this firm agreement was reached in July 1972 on a comprehensive disputes procedure which is based on the following status quo clause:

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45. Letter from the local employers' association to the TGWU full-time official, 16 September 1970. During the same period, all the TGWU stewards' 'refused to sit down around the table with the stewards of other unions' to listen to management proposals to reduce factory activity. Company dossier on industrial relations, op.cit., Appendix V, Issue 3, p. 4.

46. TGWU shop stewards committee Minutes book, January 1971.

47. TGWU shop stewards committee Minutes book, January 1971; also a formal interview with the NUSMW shop steward, 15 October 1979.

> Any decisions which alter employees' established wages and conditions, arrangements or other changes to contract, including dismissals or redundancy, will not be implemented if the employees concerned object, until the procedure has been exhausted.

The counterpart, that there should be no industrial action and no sanction or restriction applied before the stages of procedure had been exhausted, was no less important. Both the shop steward leadership and senior management were fully committed to this dispute procedure. In the interviews some shop stewards raised the point that their status quo agreement was more comprehensive than the 1976 engineering agreement. It covered disciplinary cases, in which there was no distinction between 'gross industrial misconduct which necessitates instant dismissal' and dismissal with due notice (national engineering agreement, art. 5). Although status quo originally was a trade union demand, management also wanted it as the basis on which more rational resolution of disputes could be developed. Indeed, managers raised status quo (i.e. its counterpart) more regularly than the union side did. And there were occasions where senior managers showed that they were prepared to accept the constraints this might place on the company, to reinforce the legitimacy of the disputes procedure. In the words of the industrial relations manager:

> Status quo is the key element of industrial relations at [Firm B]. It means that one side does not act unilaterally against the other. This is the ingredient, the single thing, which is instrumental in making sure the procedure is respected.[48]

Another important step forward was the establishment of a structure for disclosure of information and negotiation. The managing director made it clear that the type of structure he had in mind was nothing less than a works council on the lines of what he had experienced at Glacier

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48. Interview, 31 October 1979.

Metal Co. The current managing director and his predecessor shared the view that they should have 'one central consultative and negotiating body responsible for all aspects dealing with the terms and conditions of employment'.[49] There is evidence of proposals for the setting up of 'works committees' in 1971 which met with outright refusal from the unions.[50] In July 1973 the managing director came back with a formal proposal for a works council which was turned down by the unions without much discussion. It appears that the main reason for union opposition was that such an authoritative body was incompatible with the principles of union and sectional autonomy.[51] Having to accept that such a decision-making body, with representatives of all manual and staff groups within the company, could not be set up, management had to be content with a less ambitious structure. However, in developing this framework on a gradual basis, management did not renounce completely its ultimate goal of a unique and integrated structure at company level.[52]

The first provision for regular meetings at company level was the site information meeting which was held regularly on a monthly basis. There the managing director provided a substantial flow of information on sales, productivity and other general matters to the JSSC and the Joint Staff

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49. Interview with managing director, 13 May 1980.

50. One entry in the TGWU shop stewards committee Minutes book reads: 'Re: the statement about Works Committees. The N/S [night-shift] fully endorse the D/S decision to reject all overtures on this subject and it should be pointed out to management that we now consider this matter dead and buried'. Meeting held on 8 December 1971.

51. Interview with TGWU convenor, 12 May 1980. It is worth noting that the Glacier Metal Co. works council was 'a multi-sided, totally representative policy-making body' where the rule of unanimity voting prevailed. See Brown and Jaques, 1965:29-37. Obviously, this has nothing in common with the works council in operation at Firm A.

52. They have opted for 'a slow but steady progress . . . to reach to that point progressively'. Interview with managing director, 13 May 1980.

Committee. Under the influence of the current managing director, this became the occasion for better communications with workers' representatives on labour relations matters (as well as on the mutual impact labour relations and market issues have on each other). The JSSC-Management meeting established in 1973 was another monthly occasion where the managing director discussed with the shop stewards a broad range of issues. While it was seen by many as a negotiating meeting, it was in fact something of a 'progress meeting' (or 'quasi-negotiation' meeting) where the JSSC members could raise issues with top management.[53] Indeed, there was an element of continuous bargaining, but it was bargaining of a very particular type since it was not really supported by the ultimate threat of industrial action. It was therefore comparable with the works council meeting at Firm A. At the meetings which I attended as an observer in 1979, this body dealt with issues as varied as lay-off pay, harmonisation (between manual and staff employees), prices at the canteen, holidays, clocking, redundancy payments, and so on.

Regular information meetings were also held at divisional and (with less regularity) unit levels. From the minutes of these meetings between production managers and shop stewards it appears that discussion focused mainly on production and market issues (e.g. output, sales, state of the order book, and particular aspects of relations with customers) and health and safety. This was also the appropriate medium for management to implore the stewards to pass on the message about the vital need for better labour productivity. Taking account of the regular meetings dealing exclusively with health and safety at company level, this means that the structure of labour relations was particularly complex at Firm B.

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53. Informal interviews with personnel director (12 July 1979) and industrial relations manager (8 August 1979).

Another major development in this institutional reform was the annual negotiation of a comprehensive wage agreement, a procedure similar to that in Firm A. As in the other firm, there had been much resistance to the centralisation of bargaining. Indeed, there was more resistance at Firm B, mainly because of a tradition of sectional autonomy. The usual pattern was that negotiation started with the JSSC at factory level before developing into fragmented bargaining at sectional or occupational level. Significant progress was made in 1980 when the wage agreement was accepted on a union by union basis, with the usual distinction between pieceworkers and flat rate workers.

The first comprehensive wage agreement for manual workers was negotiated in 1974, when management succeeded in getting rid of the APE system and introducing the pecking order. There was much less room for negotiation in 1976 and 1977 because of incomes policies. From 1978 the negotiations were broader in scope and also more protracted. The productivity scheme which had operated since 1974 was then consolidated into the base rates and part of the wage increase also had to be 'funded by changed working practices coupled with a resultant reduction in head-count'.[54] Many issues involved in the 1979 and 1980 negotiations will be discussed in the following chapters.

As in the other company studied, this structure was not static and some proposals for improvements came from management at the time of our fieldwork. In the brief section which follows, attention is focused on a comparison of the patterns of labour relations problems which developed in these two firms and the process of institutionalisation which followed.

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54. 1978 hourly rated wage settlement, art. 1.5. It should also be noted that a new added value bonus scheme was established in 1979. This involved the creation of productivity improvements groups comprising production managers and shop stewards at different levels.

3. TWO DIFFERENT PATTERNS OF CONFLICT

From the empirical evidence presented so far in this chapter, it is now possible to set out a brief comparison of the labour relations conditions which led to institutional reforms in both firms.

Starting with the trends which were common to these two firms before the reforms, the decayed payment systems were a major defect. Most production workers were paid on the basis of traditional piecework schemes, the standards being much more the result of fragmented bargaining than proper work measurement. Such bargaining pressure generated wage drift, differential problems, and disruption at work group or sectional level. More than anything else, the lack of a coherent structure for conducting labour relations impeded any major improvement in pay determination or other work relations issues. In both workplaces, the bargaining structures and the disputes procedures were dysfunctional. This was exacerbated by problems of union structure and representation, the major unions refusing to work on a joint basis in the two cases.

The shortcomings of the institutional framework meant that bargaining and job regulation were decentralised, putting great pressure on junior management. The line of authority of these supervisors was not clear and they often lacked the training an man-management skills to control labour efficiently. Unco-ordinated decision-making on their part frequently led to spontaneous sanctions being applied by the shop-floor.

Again in both companies the 'labour problems' were seen as a cause of serious financial difficulties. Both firms experienced several years of deficit and the possibility of closure was seriously considered at Firm B. In a good number of the firms studied by Purcell, labour relations crises also had affected the customers' confidence and put the future of the enterprise at risk (1979a and 1981; see also Department of Employment,

1971:11-13).

But the conditions prevailing in the two firms prior to the reform were found to be fundamentally different in many ways. First, the shop steward organisation was much stronger at Firm B. A robust and autonomous shop-floor organisation offered a high degree of resistance to management in the late sixties. This was particularly the case for the press operators, the tinsmiths, the polishers, and the toolmakers. Such a degree of union organisation and worker resistance never existed at the other company.

Second, all the evidence gathered shows that there was a much more substantial degree of job control at Firm B, an aspect documented in detail in this chapter. The shop-floor had forced encroachments into management action on many aspects of labour utilisation. Obviously a high degree of job control was found in the craft areas, but some material was presented to show that press operators also had a considerable degree of control over mobility of labour, overtime distribution, work pace, and other related issues. The available information does not suggest that a comparable degree of job control was to be found at Firm A.

Partly as a consequence of the differences just described, Firm B experienced a much higher frequency and intensity of industrial action. The labour relations crisis in the press shops culminated in a period of 'trauma' in 1969. Purcell (1979a:15-18) argued that such an experience may generate 'feelings of coercive dependency' and trust and hence represent a highly influential factor in making possible successful reforms. There was also some disruption at Firm A, involving blacking, overtime bans and some stoppages of work, but the scale of this was in no way comparable to Firm B.

It appears that at Firm A worker opposition was mainly (though

not exclusively) concentrated on pay, and this was exacerbated by an inadequate structure of labour relations for dealing with pay issues. In 1971-2, 90 per cent of the recorded disputes concerned pay (CIR, 1973: 16-17). Without endorsing Maitland's general argument with regard to the origin and impact of 'disorder', the following account seems to correspond to the situation then prevailing at Firm A:

> In attempting to exploit its power to force a resolution of its own grievances, each individual group contributed to the further disorganisation of the pay system as a whole, thus creating a new generation of anomalies. I am suggesting, then, that it was the breakdown of management control that provoked workers' attempts to assert their own control; and, in the process, workers completed another cycle in the destruction of management control. (Maitland, 1980:359)

Maitland found the origin of disorder in the 'demoralisation' of the pay system coupled with the breakdown of management control. And he added that 'this sort of breakdown of management control over a P.B.R. system . . . is almost endemic in British industry' (1980:359; see also Maitland, 1983).

However, such an explanation would not square with the situation which prevailed at Firm B in the late sixties. The problem was more complex. Shop-floor action was not a reaction or adjustment to weak management control; rather it was a case in which shop-floor resistance contributed to weakening an authoritarian management. An autonomous organisation developed to resist management action and improve wages and working conditions. Work relations in the press shops were depicted as a struggle for control on the shop-floor between a strong and militant shop-floor organisation and authoritarian management. It is true that conflict was also focused upon pay and the wage-effort bargain. But, in contrast to Firm A, it generated some inroads into management freedom on many other aspects of labour utilisation. Piecework bargaining in the press

shops helped to reinforce the shop-floor organisation and broaden the scope of job control to an extent which never existed in the machine shops at Firm A.

Independently of these two different patterns of conflict, the managements of both firms saw the structure of labour relations as the major problem. They implemented institutional reforms which are in many ways comparable. Indeed, this institutionalisation of labour relations may be typical of the developments which took place in engineering and more generally in the manufacturing sector of British industry over the decade following the publication of the Donovan Report. Chapter 5 focuses on managerial objectives and strategies, and in particular on the impact of the reforms on management and the shop-floor organisations.

CHAPTER 5

IMPACT ON MANAGEMENT AND THE SHOP-FLOOR ORGANISATIONS

Having in mind the modifications in the labour relations framework over the previous decade, this chapter focuses on the impact of the reform on management and labour organisations. Before going more deeply into these matters, a first section deals with managerial strategies in both firms.

1. MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES IN THE FIRMS

There are two dimensions to the institutional frameworks developed in the two firms: the setting up of a bargaining structure at company level, and an integrated grievance and disputes procedure. They correspond with the general strategies of reducing shop-floor bargaining and restraining conflict within proper boundaries.

Attention was first directed to pay bargaining, which was seen by many managers as the source of the problem. Hence the management of Firms A and B involved the new JSSC in the negotiation of a wage structure, something which did not really exist in its proper sense prior to the reform. From then on, wage increases were to be negotiated annually at company level, integrating the two plants in the case of Firm A. Managers also put great effort into trying to improve their control over the piecework schemes covering production workers. Such a centralised bargaining structure also created the conditions for the negotiation of fringe benefits (e.g. improvements in holiday, sickness benefits, lay-off pay at Firm A, etc.) and productivity bonus schemes in both cases.

The other major development was the introduction of the grievance and disputes procedures through which the disputes arising at the shop-floor

could be channelled. In both cases this included a status quo clause and made no distinction between disputes of right and disputes of interest.[1] One of the functions of such a structure was to improve consistency in management decision-making and reduce spontaneity in labour resistance. For instance, the rationale of such a procedural framework meant that organised workers were not to apply any form of industrial action before the senior shop steward(s) and the personnel director (as well as the managing director at Firm B) had been involved and the procedure was exhausted. Greater formalisation and codification would also foster the development of case-law within the enterprise. In another respect, management strategy consisted of taking some pressure off the level of production, the management of labour conflict becoming another staff function within the management organisation. In contrast with the old engineering procedure, it also had the 'advantage' of fostering more autonomy from the outside unions.

As part of the management strategy, two preconditions were necessary to facilitate the implementation of the structural reform and the emergence of the conditions which could make it successful. Briefly, both sides had to centralise power within their respective organisation. In the words of Purcell (1979a:16), 'the negotiators on each side had to gain some control over their organisation in order to become a trusted bargaining partner' (see also Terry, 1979:385, 387).

If they were to overcome the financial difficulties referred to earlier, managers had first to reinforce the control structure at the top of their organisation. This was also essential if labour relations reforms

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1. This last point is an essential feature of Clegg's 'common law model' of labour relations (1979:117), which characterises this industry.

were to be successful:

> Weak control systems also make formal central negotiation difficult by making a coherent management industrial relations policy impossible. Any central negotiation is likely to become undermined if the various supervisors within the factory continue to operate as independent policy makers. (Brown,1973:156)

Indeed, senior managers had identified the weakness of junior management as a serious cause of disruption. They felt compelled to limit further the sphere of discretion of these supervisors and consolidate control at a higher level in the hierarchy.

It was also part of management strategy to foster a parallel reinforcement of power at the centre of the domestic organisation. Management wished to negotiate with a central shop steward body representing the collective interests of the workforce. The shop steward leadership should be sufficiently autonomous to make deals with management and influential in selling it to the membership.[2] Management accepted that agreements had to be ratified by the rank-and-file, but this should be done on the broadest possible basis (i.e. for the manual workforce as a whole, or on a union-by-union basis).

A related element of this strategy consisted of encouraging the development of conditions in which the collective voice of the workforce would predominate over sectional interests. The potential for disruption by sectional groups had to be neutralised. To some extent, this could be achieved by relating sectional demands to the priorities of the whole shop steward organisation on the one hand, and to the financial and economic situation of the enterprise (i.e. 'what it could afford') on the other.

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2. From this managerial perspective, a production manager at Firm B portrayed the ideal shop steward as the 'non-militant leader'. Hence he should combine the independence (in relation to his/her members) of a leader with the quality of being a moderate. Interview, 3 October 1979.

The whole managerial approach to shop stewards was summarised by the industrial relations manager (Firm B): 'we are not trying to reduce the power of the shop stewards, we want to change its direction'.[3] It is possible to outline four aspects of this strategy which were common to both firms. The first principle was the improvement or consolidation of the procedural position of the unions and their elected representatives within the workplace. Secondly, the management of both firms strongly encouraged the formation of a JSSC. A third element, which emerged later in the decade, was management's attempt to develop the conditions to reinforce the power of senior shop stewards in relation to the other stewards and the rank-and-file. Finally, it was the policy of labour managers in these two firms to strengthen the autonomy of the shop stewards in their relations with the full-time officials. Management realised that such a relative autonomy, which had developed prior to the reform, could be integrated as an asset within the broad strategy presented here.[4] On this point, Terry (1983:81) suggested that 'by encouraging the development of independent steward organisations capable of operating without full-time officials . . . management assisted in a process of increasing shop steward authority within a developing situation that could be seen as the first moves towards a form of "company unionism"'.

Before looking at the results of this strategy in more detail in sections 2 and 3, two general observations should be made at this point.

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3. Interview, 31 October 1979. This appears to be typical of management strategy in many workplaces; see Terry (1983) and Purcell (1979b).

4. It is interesting to note that of the classic Flanders observation about bargaining being 'largely informal, largely fragmented and largely autonomous' (1975:169), only the last feature was compatible with the new approach to workplace labour relations.

The first point is that centralisation, which is of the essence of institutionalisation, is also very much a characteristic feature of management rationale. Hence, following the institutional reform, the structure of bargaining and grievance resolution is, at least in principle, much more in line with management structure and hierarchy.

Referring to an analytical distinction put forward in Chapter 1, the development of this structure of joint regulation may also be seen as a reinforcement of the political structure (superstructure), the object of which is to lessen conflict at the point of production. This was to be achieved by channelling economic conflict (conflict over work relations) through the political process (the structure of labour relations).

2. IMPACT OF THE REFORM ON THE DISTRIBUTION OF POWER WITHIN MANAGEMENT

A major feature of the institutionalisation of labour relations was a process of centralisation. Indeed, management had to centralise control within its organisation as a necessary condition for the implementation and success of the reform. It was also to be expected that the centralisation of the bargaining structure and greater adherence to the disputes procedure would cause a further reinforcement of power at the centre on both sides (Purcell, 1981:241). Such an effect was effectively observed in Firms A and B. However, management control was more centralised at Firm A in the sense that operations were more tightly controlled by a relatively small network of senior managers.

It was also widely recognised in the two cases that the reform brought about other changes in the distribution of power within management. One obvious effect was the improved status of personnel and industrial relations managers (a staff function) in relation to production managers (line) within the hierarchy. To some degree, this corresponded with a noticeable shift from decision-making and bargaining on the shop-floor to a

higher level within the procedural framework, where labour relations specialists were more likely to be involved. Personnel and industrial relations managers were also pointed to as the specialists who had the task to devise and implement a procedural framework which was capable of overcoming the labour problems. Consequently, they were put in the 'driver's seat' as far as labour relations were concerned.

This professionalisation and increased estimation of the personnel and industrial relations function was shown by the higher status of the personnel directors. For instance, here is the evolution at Firm A:

> Until 1969 personnel matters were handled by a director, now retired, who also had production responsibilities. In 1969, the company recruited its first personnel manager mainly to take over from line managers the tasks of negotiation. The job title was broadened to personnel and industrial relations manager when the present managers joined the company. (CIR, 1973:3)

The latter change occurred in 1972; since then, the same manager had been promoted to staff director. The personnel director at Firm B was a senior executive director sitting on the main board. In both cases, therefore, there was a senior manager whose sole responsibility was personnel and industrial relations. There was also an increase in the staffing of the personnel department, especially at Firm A. In this case, this broad managerial function also included the production engineering department where the manager was very influential and much involved in devising the production control system based on work study.[5]

This rise in influence and status of personnel and industrial relations managers within the companies aroused some rivalries between managers. More importantly, many production managers were sceptical, if not cynical, about the reformist approach. A typical comment was that labour

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5. On the broad trend of specialisation of personnel and industrial relations management in the manufacturing sector, see Brown (1981:26-31).

relations specialists were 'too soft' with shop stewards, being always prepared to have meetings and to negotiate, and that such a strategy had negative effects on management control at the shop-floor and on productivity. A production manager (unit level) at Firm B argued that management obsession with industrial peace following the crisis of the late sixties had now created a situation in which they were 'suffering of being too democratic'.[6] Such scepticism was common at the intermediary level of production management in both cases, and it was also expressed by the senior production managers of the two factories at Firm A.[7] In the other company, the strong personal commitment of the managing director to the objectives and the whole process of reform meant that the strategy was more widely understood and accepted at senior management level. Nevertheless, there were some signs of scepticism and reluctance by line managers with regard to the reform, which was noted by Ogden (1981:35-6). He observed that within the ranks of line managers,

> few were prepared to countenance the formal extension of joint regulation to 'managerial relations', i.e. the organisation of work and the utilisation of labour . . .
>
> Little credence was given to Flanders' dictum about regaining control by sharing it. The notion of sharing power (if taken literally) assumes common interests between managers and workers. Such an assumption was at odds with line managers' everyday experience of conflict with the shopfloor. They perceived this in power terms and believed the shopfloor already had too much power. (1981:36)

If personnel and industrial relations managers were generally recognised as being more influential as a result of the institutional reforms, other researchers have noted that it was junior management who lost

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6. Interview, 5 October 1979.

7. Formal interviews with two production managers (19 December 1978) and the personnel director (21 December 1978).

most in terms of influence and power (see, for example, Terry, 1977:80-88; Purcell, 1979a:4; Maitland, 1980:360). The bulk of the following section, therefore, deals with the impact of the reform on the position of the foremen in the firms where observations were conducted. Since our major concern is the study of job control, it is relevant to look more closely at the behaviour of management representatives on the shop-floor.

2.1 Eroding the Influence of Foremen

Much of the discussion of this section is relevant to the situation of the first two layers of the management structure, which may be referred to as the supervisors. However, the discussion focuses mainly on the activity of foremen. Marsh's observation (1979:117) that 'the precise status of the foreman varies from one company and factory or workplace to another' is relevant to the cases studied here. Thus the foremen in the machine shops at Firm A worked regularly as setters. At Firm B, the foremen would certainly not be allowed to do any setting or other similar work.

Blackburn and Mann (1979:197) wrote that 'foremen and supervisors generally have two roles, that of organisational intermediary, ensuring that the correct flow of materials reaches their section, and that of coercive overseer, ensuring that the men actually do what they are supposed to'. These two roles correspond to a similar distinction between the 'technical' and the 'labour control' functions of management where the latter consists of 'a structure of authority which ensures the compliance of subordinates, many of whom do not share the interests of management' (Hill, 1981:16). Going back to the distinction drawn in Chapter 1, these are the functions of control over the work process and control over work relations.

To put it simply, the foreman's role consists in maintaining

production, or getting the best level of production from a given ratio of capital and labour in particular circumstances. He must be sufficiently flexible to adapt to changing conditions (breakdowns, short delays in production, etc.). In order to carry out the labour control function effectively, the supervisor should have the capacity to generate the two crucial managerial assets of motivation and discipline. As a general rule, a balance of motivation and discipline is necessary to ensure that subordinates agree, by consent or coercion, to transform their labour power into labour in the work process. At the foreman level the emphasis is likely to be on discipline because foremen are involved at the point of production, where industrial conflict originates, and also because they have to make sure workers comply with variable factory conditions. Moreover, as stressed by R. Edwards, the type of management control (or 'top-down coordination') which 'characterizes capitalist workplaces' requires a degree of coercion (1979:16-17).

From this perspective, it is interesting to look at the sphere of decision-making of the foremen in the late seventies. Here it is relevant to consider four general aspects of work relations where foremen could, in principle, develop a bargaining relationship with work groups and shop stewards. Starting with pay and fringe benefits, it was obvious in both case studies that under the new pattern of labour relations foremen had little direct influence. Pay bargaining had been centralised and fringe benefits were negotiated at central level. In piecework areas, however, their rigour or slackness with respect to clocking had some influence on pay.

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8. Edwards (1979:17) put some emphasis on the distinction between co-ordination, which is required in all social production, and control, which is 'required in all class-based shocial systems'.

A second category of issues where the reform had further limited the range of decision-making by supervisors is internal mobility (permanent transfer, promotion within manual work, etc.). This had been made very formal at Firm A, where the strict application of the internal recruitment policy meant that supervisors had very little say in the 'promotion of good workers'. Although the procedure was less rigid at Firm B, foremen were no more influential in this matter.

It was on a third category of decisions, involving the assignment of labour, work allocation, and other issues closely related to the work process, that the influence of foremen was still most significant. The volume of shop-floor decisions was comparatively smaller at Firm A because the proportion of large batches was more important and the work process generally more stable. At Firm B, however, the foreman's sphere of decisions was more severely constrained by worker control. Nevertheless, the importance of the foreman's range of choices concerning production should not be minimised. The utilisation of labour in the work process naturally requires frequent reorganisations and changes, and it is in this day-to-day decision-making that the highest discretionary margin for junior management is found. Indeed, the institutionalisation of labour relations has a much stronger impact on the regulation of remuneration and the <u>conditions</u> of labour utilisation than on issues concerning the <u>way</u> labour is utilised. It is therefore on this third category of issues, which are more specific and variable and consequently more difficult to regulate at factory or company level, that the foreman retains some discretion.

Finally, the application of disciplinary sanctions represents a crucial aspect for our concern here. The evidence was quite clear on this account: in both firms the power to impose disciplinary sanctions had been totally removed from the foremen. And in fact the influence of the second-

line supervisor was more formal than real in this respect. The personnel director had ultimate control over any disciplinary sanction at Firm A. In Firm B the status quo clause applied and was strictly interpreted; it effectively meant that nobody could be suspended or dismissed until the procedure had been exhausted. Indeed, a worker might have been dismissed by a production manager and carried on working until the Works Conference met. For instance, an operator in Press shop no. 3 was sacked by the unit manager during the first week of February 1978 for refusing to work normally and insubordination. He went to work until the Works Conference on 22 March.[9] Commenting on this procedure at Firm B, Evans (1980:94) pointed out:

> Because of the time, effort and interruption to production this involved, it acted as a disincentive to lower management from bringing disciplinary charges.
>
> . . . between 1972 and 1979, there were only 2 cases where workers received suspensions from work (and a further 4 employees were invited to resign without the issue going on their references). For managers, having to continue to work with employees on this basis 'devalued' their authority and further discouraged pursuing disciplinary action.

In interviews, many junior managers expressed the feeling that they would need a 'perfect case' to go through procedure with a real chance of success. They and the shop-floor workers were aware of how severely this had affected the junior managers' position and this was true irrespective of how frequently disciplinary action was taken by these managers. The fact was that they had completely lost the power to impose ultimate sanctions, to retaliate. In the words of a TGWU shop steward, 'foremen have little power, they cannot sack anybody but we can make life miserable for them'.[10]

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9. Sources: TGWU shop stewards committee Minutes book; interview with TGWU convenor, 25 October 1979.

10. Informal interview, 22 August 1979.

It was noted above that the sphere of influence of foremen had been restricted in many ways and that, in these two case studies, their authority to act had been eroded. It is worth stressing that foremen had little to offer with regard to means by which to motivate workers. For instance, in both cases they only had limited influence on remuneration and internal mobility. But if this observation is correct, what did management expect from foremen with respect to labour control following the reform? Basically, it appears that their function had to do with two general aspects of work relations. One was the organisation and control of labour in the work process. They were expected to develop the conditions for the highest level of productivity from a given ratio of capital and labour. The second function was labour supervision and discipline in its broadest sense: enforcement of rules regarding time-keeping, clocking, volume and quality of production, and a great number of workshop regulations and practices. Because of the objective basis of conflict at the shop-floor, there was a need for a layer of management at this level to apply some degree of coercion and 'police' the system. Even the best overall structure of job regulation and accommodation could not operate without a system of supervision and discipline at the shop-floor level.

2.2 The Strategic Position of the Foremen

On the evaluation of the foremen's record regarding labour supervision and discipline, those interviewed on both sides gave answers which were fairly similar for both firms. It was felt that foremen had become too weak and powerless to fulfil this aspect of their function with authority.[11] This certainly was the version of middle and senior management. It was also observed that labour relations specialists were more critical than

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11. This view was also expressed by Evans in his research into labour relations in Firm B (1980:78-9).

production managers in their evaluation of the foremen's performance. This may be explained partly by their tendency to undervalue the foreman's role as regards the work process. Although most managers felt that the institutional reform was the main causal factor explaining the impotence of the foremen, this analysis was not accepted by all the informants in Firm B. For example, the current managing director argued that the impotence of foremen stemmed from the late sixties (i.e. before the reform), the period referred to as the labour relations crisis. He described this period as being 'real anarchy, a situation where management had completely lost control over any aspect of discipline'.[12] At Firm A, however, the personnel director held the view that, as a result of the reform, foremen could not count on the power assets they used to have. Having in mind the earlier situation, he added this comment: 'I don't like it, but it would be disastrous if they were strong'.[13]

From interviews with foremen and second-line supervisors at Firm B, there is no doubt that they were very aware of their loss of authority. Indeed, a high degree of demoralisation was observed among their ranks. While some expressed feelings of frustration for having lost the 'right to manage' and not being 'backed up', others appeared to have adopted an attitude of 'demobilisation', in the sense that they had 'given up'.[14]

In both firms, shop-floor workers also held the view that foremen had become weak and useless in many respects. In the machine shops (Firm A), for instance, most machinists were skillful and autonomous enough to produce without much involvement of the foremen. When the Firm B managing director

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12. Interview, 13 May 1980.

13. Interview, 21 December 1978.

14. At Firm B, structured interviews were conducted with two supervisors of each of the following three production units: the Automotive heat transfer unit, the toolroom, and the no. 3 shop. A toolroom section manager who expressed strong feelings about the supervisors' loss of authority said bitterly: 'I think the gaffers should run the place and it's not the case at the moment'.

directly addressed the shop stewards and then all the employees in October 1979 in order to inform them of the company's poor financial situation and of the urgent need for improvements in productivity, the counter-argument which was expressed most often by the stewards and manual workers was the excessive number of staff employees and the impotence of junior management. They blamed the weakness of foremen and section managers, particularly as far as enforcement of discipline and organisation of work were concerned, for many of the problems the company was facing.[15]

Indeed, although everybody agreed on the impotence of supervisors, there was a debate within the ranks of the TGWU shop stewards at Firm B about the appropriate trade union strategy in this respect. Although the majority uncritically held the view that it was 'management's job to manage', others argued that it was a wrong trade union principle to advocate a reinforcement of the foremen's position. They stressed that it should be remembered 'what the bastards could do when they were stronger'. The most outspoken of those holding this latter view was the TGWU convenor. He argued that there was a need for self-discipline and that shop stewards should assume some of the responsibility in this respect, in order to 'fill the gap' created by weaker supervision.[16] This was based on the trade union principle that the more workers gain control, the more they must enforce collective discipline and act in 'a responsible manner'. This view was held strongly by the old guard of shop stewards who had been through the struggle for control against management. With a further erosion

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15. It was possible to attend the managing director meeting with all the day-shift shop stewards as well as two mass meetings with the whole workforce (which had been divided into three large groups).

16. Interview with TGWU convenor, 25 October 1979. The convenor liked to repeat, half seriously, that 'the solution was to get rid of the foremen'.

of the collective spirit in the late 1970s, this became an issue discussed within the shop-floor organisation.

The main argument of this section is that the foremen's strategic position within the workplace might contribute to an explanation of their lack of commitment to rule enforcement. In order to achieve results in carrying out their functions, as defined in the preceding section, they needed shop-floor co-operation. A basic degree of accommodation was necessary for an acceptable level of production to be maintained. Probably the most crucial asset in this respect was flexibility of labour. This was most needed by junior management when there were urgent modifications in the work process, or any unforeseen circumstances. More concretely, these were cases such as breakdowns or changes in production lines as a result of lack of material or short delivery targets.

Conversely, what might be most detrimental to the achievement of the foremen's objectives was the whole range of collective and individual sanctions which could be applied on the shop-floor. Although lack of co-operation could take many forms, most pervasive sanctions against shop-floor management related to the way labour power was transformed into the work process. Labour mobility, job content and demarcation, and intensity of effort were highly sensitive. Depending on their contribution to the work process and their degree of job control, a variable range of sanctions were available to work groups and sections.[17] In the press shops, for instance, the fact that operators had to intervene at every cycle (say, four hundred times an hour) meant that the individual, the work group or the section could easily enforce a limitation of effort. It was also in

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17. For instance, a work-to-rule was likely to have a much stronger impact in the case of workers with a very high degree of job control.

this area that sabotage occurred most frequently, as compared with all other production areas within the two companies.[18] More generally, there were plenty of opportunities for working without enthusiasm and resorting to 'restrictive labour practices'. These were the forms of worker resistance to which foremen were likely to be responsive. Hence Batstone, Boraston and Frenkel (1978:41) observed that

> the limitation or withdrawal of co-operation could be particularly effective in relation to more junior management, and therefore it tended to be used over issues negotiated with them which could not easily be raised at higher levels of the management hierarchy.

Indeed, these sanctions were more detrimental to the foremen's position than strike action, overtime bans and other forms of overt industrial action. The latter were more likely to come within the responsibility of labour relations specialists and higher levels of line management. Moreover, the bargaining and dealings related to the second type of sanctions tended to be channelled through the structure of conflict regulation.

Although many sanctions such as restriction of output incurred some costs on the part of the workers in piecework areas, it is nevertheless the case that these more subtle and intermediary forms of sanction had many advantages from the workers' viewpoint (Batstone, Boraston and Frenkel, 1978:41). One of them was the possibility of excerting real pressure without overt struggle. Indeed, the workers' side had control over the duration and intensity of the sanction. They could put on the pressure and then relax it, as part of the bargaining process (Batstone, Boraston and Frenkel, 1977:

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18. It was not possible to get hard evidence on the frequency of such action. It is interesting to note, however, that the participants did not refer to it as sabotage, a concept with a strong emotional and ideological charge. Usually it was simply referred to as 'mislocation', a practice which might have the effect of breaking a tool or tools on the press. Supervisors knew that some of the mislocations of components were deliberate acts, though it was difficult to prove it; some final warnings were given for this practice in 1978 and 1979. Sabotage occasionally occurred when an operator could not find any other way out of a bad job.

241-2). This type of opposition was also more frequent than overt industrial action: it was an integral part of the process of control on the shop-floor.

An interesting problem for our purpose is the question of the power assets at the disposal of the foreman in this process of control. What did he have to offer, or on what basis could he develop a bargaining relationship? It seems that one of the key elements in this was precisely the ability of being lenient or indulgent in the enforcement of rules. It was reported at the beginning of this sub-section that the foremen in both firms displayed a high degree of indulgence in their function of labour supervision and discipline.

One of the issues on which foremen generally had some discretion was time-keeping (starting and finishing time, duration of tea breaks, etc.). This included the shop practices on lateness and also the usual period of time-wasting at the beginning of the shift. For pieceworkers, the whole question of clocking practices was a central part of their preoccupations. In the press shops, where foremen had to sign when operators clocked off the jobs but not when they clocked on, the practice of fiddling the clock was tolerated to a considerable extent at the time of the fieldwork. This could have some impact on the intensity of effort and the pay packet of the operator. At Firm A, supervisors were also indulgent in signing the piecework card for down time. By looking at production control reports which were produced on a weekly basis and studied by some managers, it was possible to find out the extent of down time for all groups under the premium system. Over a six-week period ending on 1 December 1978, the hours lost on down time represented 21.5 per cent of all clocked hours. For a similar period ending on 7 December 1979, 23 per cent of all clocked hours were lost on down time.[19] This was a cause of concern for senior managers

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19. Management documents: production control summaries. The proportion of down time quoted here is calculated on the basis of the number of clocked hours over the last week of reference.

at the time of the fieldwork.

The practice of banking, which consists in building up a small reserve of work done, was also observed in the machine shops (Firm A). The supervisors were well aware that many operators and machinists kept such a reserve of components, usually in their locker, 'in case the situation goes wrong'. It was also usual for the foremen in both firms to turn a blind eye on the practice of speeding-up (or 'rawhiding'). Indeed, a degree of worker autonomy on the continuity of effort over the whole shift was seen by many supervisors as a natural characteristic of piecework and a vested right for pieceworkers. In the press shops, the slackness if not the abdication of authority by the foremen in the whole area of clocking and supervision certainly had a part to play in the decay of the piecework scheme, an issue studied in some detail in Chapter 7. The attitude of leniency also applied to the question of discipline. It was noted above that foremen resented the fact of having lost all authority as regards disciplinary sanctions and that many of them had 'given up'.

So far attention has focused on instances where foremen failed to be strict on supervision. Brown (1972) showed that such a pattern of omission may in itself be a rule-making process. But supervisors were also involved in more positive concessions which, from then on, could not be withdrawn without this being interpreted as an infringement of shop-floor rights. Evans (1980:83) gave an example of such a concession won by the shop-floor at junior management level in Firm B:

> No. 4 shop first secured all their waiting time at 182 R (labouring rate); the other shops could only negotiate individual situations. Lower management and work study were promptly instructed to cut back payment to the other shops while an investigation took place on the reasons for the deal.

An interesting example of close co-operation was observed in Press shop no. 3 where one of the foremen was making 'deals' with some press

operators about a given level of production in exchange for some time clocked off the job (e.g. on waiting time at 175 R).[20] These deals were of two types. The most important one could involve a group of pieceworkers in a production line for one shift or part of it. The 'deal' would fix a priori a production target as well as a specified period of down time, on the understanding that 'you do that and don't bother with the clock'. This meant that the operators could produce a higher output (and bonus) than usual without being involved in the hassle of clocking on and off for waiting time, breakdowns, etc. Such a form of co-operation also had many advantages from the foreman's point of view; he could reach a relatively high production target as well as having a freer time on the shop-floor.

The 'deals' of the second type were minor ones which might occur on a 'one-off basis' when one operator or a work group faced a specific problem. In the case of a minor breakdown, for instance, the foreman would say: 'Don't clock off, I'll help you to arrange it quickly and you carry on. I'll give you 20 minutes on the clock.'[21] Hence the foreman could help the operator to make up for the time lost on breakdown and achieve a good performance. On the face of it, everybody gained by such understandings. However, in 1979 this foreman had to tell the men that he could no longer do it because he was under pressure from middle line management. It appears that the two other foremen in the shop had complained to the unit manager who reproached the foreman in question for his behaviour.

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20. Formal and informal interviews with the foreman (10 October 1979); informal interview with Press shop no. 3 steward (12 October 1979).

21. Informal interview with Press shop no. 3 shop steward (12 October 1979). Interestingly, Brown (1973:108-9) observed some practices which were similar to this second type of deal in other engineering firms in the Midlands.

The other foremen could not support this unfair competition with regard to production targets. Obviously, the unit manager could not legitimise such a practice; the foreman had contributed to a further deterioration of the piecework scheme. This example nevertheless illustrates how a foreman and some press operators found mutual advantage in isolating each other from bureaucratic control.

Before concluding the discussion on the place of the foreman within the factory, some additional points ought to be made on social relations on the shop-floor. First, it should be stressed that while foremen had no direct influence on piecework bargaining and remuneration in general, an important resource which they could bring to bear was their management of time. The preceding discussion demonstrates that time control had an immediate consequence for piecework wages. This was one of the reasons why shop-floor workers were not indifferent to the foreman's co-operation. Secondly, inasmuch as they had a degree of discretion on this and other issues, foremen also had the possibility to withdraw their co-operation and to retaliate. By 'being awkward' on time-keeping, clocking, and rule enforcement in general they could make life more difficult for everybody on the shop-floor. Hence the foremen's capacity to get on the offensive and inflict sanctions should not be underestimated. In this section it is merely suggested that most foremen adopted an attitude of accommodation rather than a conflictual one. Thus, flexibility of labour and loose supervision were the two poles of the pattern of co-operation which predominated in the factories studied.

Thirdly, it should be noted that this attitude of leniency observed in our case studies has much to do with the situation Gouldner referred to as the 'indulgency pattern' (1955:18-26). This also corresponds broadly with the findings of Brown (1973:107-11) and Terry (1977:80-86) who conducted

some research into British engineering firms. Brown certainly had a good point when he observed that it was under conditions where 'labour forces are in a strong bargaining position and disciplinary powers are weak' that 'management is likely to lean towards being indulgent in seeking the cooperation of workers' (1973:107). An effort was made here to explain this pattern of behaviour by suggesting that the foremen's range of choices was rather limited because of their strategic position in the workplace, especially following the labour relations reform. Their range of options was limited in the first place by their own appreciation of their strategic interests, and secondly by the many constraints which had the effect of weakening their position in the balance of power. A brief analysis of these two trends will complete this section.

Looking first at the strategic interests of the foremen, it should be stressed that a strict attitude with respect to labour supervision and discipline might impede the achievement of the high degree of accommodation required in order to obtain their objective in terms of production. Terry (1977:86) observed that 'these dual responsibilities can come into conflict'. He went further in arguing that

> encountering such realities can lead to the abandoning by foremen of any attempt to use the powers at their disposal through the formal rules . . . This process also speeds the onset of informal concessions, since this is all that is left to foremen if they abandon some of their disciplinary powers. In interview, foremen justified this behaviour by commenting that disciplinary procedures were not much use to them because they concentrated exclusively on punishment as a means of control. Almost unanimously, foremen expressed the view that, in practice, reward is the only effective tool.

Indeed, from the foremen's perspective, it would not be an attractive job merely to punish while having little to offer in terms of rewards. Ogden's case study, too, provides evidence of line managers who valued the discretionary margin they had in authorising bonus 'because it provided them

with a source of financial reward which they had some influence over and which they deemed necessary to secure co-operation from the workforce' (1981:34-5).

The above argument goes some way towards explaining the lenient attitude of most foremen observed in our case studies. The few who adopted an authoritarian or more offensive stance were referred to as 'bastards'. Hence the following comment was typical of shop-floor feeling: 'foremen are like everybody else, they want a quiet life'.[22] Two other factors contribute to this argument on the strategic interests of the foremen. First, foremen should not be expected to show the highest degree of commitment in enforcing rules which had been developed above them, either jointly through the institutional framework, or unilaterally from a higher level of management. The authorship of rules is important, as can be seen in the discussion developed in some detail by Terry (1977:78,83-5).[23] Second, it is a point of some relevance that foremen had been promoted from the ranks of shop-floor workers, usually after many years of service within the company.[24] In the press shops (in Firm B) and in the machine shops (in Firm A), the usual promotion line for a foreman's job was to work first

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22. Informal interview (22 August 1979) with former TGWU deputy convenor, who was promoted as setter in 1979.

23. Terry gave evidence to support the hypothesis 'that a rule will carry the greater authority with the group or individual who fought for, negotiated, or guarded that rule. This implies that groups or individuals further away from the authorship or care of such rules will be more prepared than the authors or guardians to challenge such rules' (1977:78).

24. Of all the supervisors in Firm A, only one superintendent had not been promoted internally. At Firm B, a toolroom supervisor had been in the Company for only twelve months at the time of our interview.

as an operator (or machinist) and then as a setter before passing 'on the other side'. This means that foremen knew the 'shop-floor mentality' and all the shop rules; moreover, they were likely to have established social links with some of their subordinates. This may have also contributed to their tendency towards a high degree of co-operation with the shop-floor.

The second fundamental reason why the foremen's range of options was limited concerns their relative power. In other words, to what extent did they have the power to be really effective on supervision and discipline had they wished to do so? It was pointed out that following the institutional reform, the influence of the foremen on many aspects of work relations had been eroded. They were not involved in most of the bargaining conducted through the institutional framework. Because the power basis of foremen was not strong enough, much of the attention of senior shop stewards was directed towards higher levels of management. The following observation is relevant in this respect:

> A strong bargaining relationship rests upon a broad balance of power between the two persons involved. Unless the other person has a degree of power, there is little attraction in giving him confidences and support, for little will be gained in return. It is for this reason that shop-floor convenors do not have bargaining relationships with any foremen. (Batstone, Boraston and Frenkel, 1977:171)

In the case of the ordinary shop stewards, a much greater proportion of their bargaining activity was still carried on with their foremen, although they also had plenty of opportunities to upstage them. Moreover, the fact that in both cases foremen were not satisfactorily informed about the whole process of job regulation further contributed to their isolation. Finally, it was explained earlier how the loss of the foremen's authority to impose disciplinary sanctions and their circumscribed discretion on remuneration had affected their power.

Much of the evidence presented in this section suggests that the

labour relations reform contributed to weakening significantly the position of foremen in the two engineering firms. In principle, this could have had important implications for the degree of job control. It appears, however, that the impact on job control was different in the two firms, notably because of marked differences in the structure of management control and in the strength of the shop-floor organisations.

3. IMPACT OF THE REFORM ON THE SHOP-FLOOR ORGANISATIONS

3.1 The Wider Debate on Workplace Union Organisation

The essence of Clegg's theory of trade unionism is that many aspects of union behaviour can be explained by the structure of collective bargaining. This holds that 'the level of bargaining is the primary explanatory variable' in the study of the distribution of power within unions (1976b:54). Since 'this proposition applies to workplace organisation as to other levels of union government' (1976b:67), the theory would suggest that the centralisation of workplace collective bargaining would contribute to a corresponding centralisation of power within the domestic organisation. This is one of the central themes of this section.

Indeed, many writers have suggested that such a degree of centralisation within shop steward organisations did actually occur in British manufacturing industry during the 1970s. Terry (1979:385-8) and Hyman (1979b:57-62) discussed the consequences of this development, and although Batstone expressed many points of disagreement with their analyses, he nevertheless accepted that 'the "professionalism" and centralization of steward organization therefore appears clear' (1979:12,16). He argued that a form of 'broad-based democratic centralism' was necessary and desirable if workplace organisations were to go beyond sectionalism and

parochialism (1979:14,17,31).[25]

The period of post-Donovan reform was also marked by an extension of hierarchy within shop steward organisations in which the most remarkable change was the sharp increase in the number of full-time shop stewards (see principally Brown, 1981:62-7; and Brown, Ebsworth and Terry, 1978:143-5). Analysing the possible consequences of this trend, this latter group of researchers wrote:

> It is probable that as bargaining expertise becomes more concentrated, the potential for united action is increased, and organised responses to management become faster. At the same time increased hierarchy may make senior stewards more securely entrenched and more distant from the rank-and-file membership. It should be stressed that we use the word hierarchy here merely to indicate some sort of grading without any necessary implication as to the pattern of control in the organisation. (Brown, Ebsworth and Terry, 1978:143)

Hyman goes a step further in arguing that this development of a hierarchy coincided with two other trends. One was 'a centralisation of control within stewards' organisations', along with a reinforcement of the disciplinary powers of the joint shop stewards' committee (1979b:57; see also Hyman, 1980:74). The other development, 'a significant degree of integration between steward hierarchies and official trade union structures' (1979b:57), is not so relevant to the focus of this research. This argument, along with Terry's paper (1979), set the background for the debate on the 'incorporation' or 'bureaucratisation' of shop stewards.[26] Hyman accepted

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25. Hyman also accepted that 'the centralisation of workplace organisation is both inevitable and desirable' (1979b:62; also 59-60).

26. See also Batstone (1979:11-19). At some point in his 1979 paper, Hyman wrote: 'Against this background it is not fanciful to speak of the bureaucratisation of the rank and file' (p. 58). It is with this part of Hyman's argument in particular that Jeffereys took issue (1979: 44; also 35-6). He sought to dismiss Hyman's argument on the basis of an historical interpretation of shop-floor resistance of '<u>job-based</u> trade unionism' (1979:35-6, 43-5). However, he did not consider the many facets of Hyman's argument.

that 'it would be unrealistic to deny the need for both leadership and discipline within shop-floor organisations' (1979b:60), but he argued that too great an emphasis on control within the organisation (or control 'over' the members) could shift dramatically the balance from autonomous to incorporated workplace union organisations. His point was that

> the resources of discipline and control which are a precondition of effective collective struggle contain the potential to be turned back against trade union members in the interests of capital; channelling and containing workers' resistance to the exploitation of their labour power, facilitating and reinforcing managerial control over the labour process. (1979:60)

In contrast, the essence of Batstone's counter-argument was that while it was undeniable that centralisation had occurred,

> there is little evidence of stewards in the present era being any more incorporated - at least for any period of time - than they have been in the past . . .
>
> In addition, . . . it is not the case, from the available evidence cited previously, that this has led to a reduction in the level of bargaining among 'normal' stewards. (1979:31)[27]

It is against this background that attention now focuses on the actual impact of the reform on the government of our two workplace union organisations.

3.2 The Institutionalisation of Trade Union Action

Institutional security. Brown (1973:151) has observed that

> by formalising plant level negotiations management effectively deepens the recognition it gives to its employees' trade union organisation. It reinforces the procedural position of the stewards and, if any plant agreements negotiated between them are written down, the stewards' position is reinforced further.

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27. England (1981) also focuses on a critique of some aspects of the 'incorporation thesis', especially the question of national union government; see also Terry, 1983:88-90.

This generalisation is supported by the processes which developed in the two firms during the seventies; the unions' institutional security was consolidated. The closed shop had existed for many years at Firm B and was formalised in Firm A in 1978, and a check-off agreement was also granted in both firms. The procedural position of accredited shop stewards, too, had much improved. For example, there were more regular shop stewards' meetings during working hours. Besides the regular JSSC meetings in both plants, there were weekly meetings of the shop stewards of each union at Firm B. In some production areas regular section meetings were also held on a weekly basis during working hours, a practice seen by many experienced stewards as a sharp contrast with the situation prevailing in the sixties.[28] In both cases, the shop stewards had plenty of opportunities to meet on a more informal basis during working hours to exchange information and discuss strategy. The facilities afforded to shop stewards had improved over the last ten years, much in line with the pattern in the industry. For instance, it was widely known at Firm B that the press operators' shop stewards earned, on average, significantly more than the operators.

Because of the developments presented in Chapter 4 joint meetings between shop stewards and senior managers became much more frequent, signifying an improvement in the procedural position of the stewards. However, it must be stressed that the workers' representatives at Firm A gained more from the changes in the shop steward-management relations, because their degree of involvement in labour relations was lower, and their

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28. Such meetings were chaired by the shop steward (and in some cases the shop committee men). They were observed mainly in the Heat transfer division. In the case of production workers in the other large division (presswork), the permissiveness of the piecework scheme offered better opportunities for holding informal shop meetings.

collective influence weaker, before the reform. At Firm B, sectional shop steward organisation was already solidly based before the reform began. Indeed, there are reasons to believe that during the sixties workplace organisation in Firm B corresponded broadly to the pattern observed by Turner, Clack and Roberts (1967:192-223).[29] What happened during the following decade arose from a fundamental shift in management policies and strategies towards the shop stewards. This suggests that the two shop steward organisations were not equally indebted to the institutional reform, a fact which might foster different levels of commitment to it. It is nevertheless the case that at the time of the fieldwork both had acquired a degree of institutional security and recognition which compares well with the general pattern in the engineering industry.

Centralisation. It was noted that a degree of centralisation within the shop-floor organisation was a precondition for the effective implementation of the reform. But it must also be stressed that the centralisation of pay bargaining and a greater adherence to procedure produced, in turn, a further reinforcement of power at the centre of the shop steward organisations. This was observed within both organisations. The bargaining skills and expertise in procedural as well as substantive matters tended to become more concentrated at senior shop steward level. This was manifest in the case of the two majority unions where the number of stewards was important and the convenors were on union duties on a

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29. This research team gave a good account of the organisational complexity and the 'considerable hierarchy' which had existed for some years within shop steward organisations in the motor industry (1967:192-211). They also observed in the sixties a significant trend towards a degree of institutionalisation of workplace union action, at least in the large factories of the major motor companies (1967:212-23). Firm B also operated in the vehicles sector, within the Coventry labour market, and its workforce was organised by the predominant unions in the motor industry. Batstone, Boraston and Frenkel (1977:281-9) gave an interesting account of the history of a shop-floor organisation also containing these three characteristics.

full-time basis (or almost full-time basis at Firm A). The trend was also reinforced by the particularly long periods of office of both convenors: the TGWU convenor at Firm B had occupied this function since 1969, while the GMWU convenor at Firm A also had had long experience as a convenor when he was re-elected to this position in 1979.[30] The senior stewards' influence was particularly significant with respect to one of the aspects of power identified by Batstone, Boraston and Frenkel (1977:9), i.e. 'the initiating and directing of issues', or 'the ability to influence the "terms of debate"'.

The reinforcement of power at the centre was further encouraged because negotiation at company level created the need for ~~only minimal~~ a degree of co-ordination of action within the shop-floor organisations. The role of the senior shop stewards was crucial in preserving the balance between two union principles: the recognition of sectional (or local) autonomy and the defence of collective interests. Although not necessarily contradictory, these principles of workplace union action were not easily reconcilable in practice. Hence the unity of the collective organisation might be at risk when sanctions affecting larger groups of workers were applied by sectional groups. It was in order to deal with this problem that the TGWU organisation at Firm B adopted a rule to the effect that the convenor had to be allowed to meet a section before it could take industrial action,[31] as the following extract from a TGWU shop stewards committee meeting held in March 1975 indicates.

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30. The latter had been GMWU convenor for about twelve years and shop steward for approximately eighteen years before resigning for personal reasons a few years earlier. He had not really been replaced as a convenor in the meantime.

31. Evans (1980:82) points out that this union rule was adopted subsequent to the current convenor's election in 1969.

> Convenor put his personal views on what a convenor's function should be, as he felt that recently he was being used in a minor capacity and when sections were advocating strike action, he wasn't being invited to hear the pros and cons of the argument and also to put points of view in a broader context . . . After a long discussion, unanimous agreement was reached that Convenor should talk to sections before any Industrial Action was implemented. (Minutes book, 26 March 1975)

Of course, one of the justifications for such a degree of 'coordination' was the need to inform other parts of the membership and eventually seek their support. Hence 'the shop stewards procedure agreed some time back is that the convenor is called in before any section walks out so he can hear the views of the section in case he needs to inform any other section who might be affected'.[32]

The preceding references to TGWU policies suggest some of the reasons why the management of both firms acted in a way designed to give more power to the senior stewards in their relations with ordinary stewards and members. This objective, however, was only partially attained because the senior stewards lacked the will and confidence to systematically concentrate more power at the centre. Considering the tradition of fractionalism, this would have put more pressure on them, with some risks of a more co-ordinated opposition within the union ranks. Moreover, there was in both cases a considerable shop-floor resistance to any loss of autonomy, a subject discussed later in this chapter.

Institutionalisation had a discernible but moderate influence on hierarchy within the shop-floor organisations. At Firm A, the JSSC regrouped all the shop stewards, but the elected posts did not lead to

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32. TGWU shop stewards committee Minutes book, 26 April 1978. In another entry, dated 1 June 1977, it is reported that 'Convenor stated that he was seeking meeting with setters to explain they had not yet had a works conference, and would have to meet him if they were to ask for the support of other sections'.

much more influence within the organisation.[33] Influence on the committee depended much more on personal leadership, on the steward's standing within his union, and on the nature and size of his constituency. The five shop stewards on the works council could be considered as an 'executive committee' (Brown, Ebsworth and Terry, 1978:143), although it was stressed that they had little autonomy in relation to the whole shop steward body.

Obviously, size is extremely important with respect to hierarchy, and institutionalisation contributed to the development of a more elaborate hierarchy in Firm B. Apart from the distinctive pattern within each union (hierarchy was more sophisticated in the case of the TGWU), there were two levels of delegation within the factory. The JSSC was a ten-member committee which held regular monthly meetings, had joint meetings with senior management (also on a monthly basis), and engaged in bargaining during the annual pay negotiations. It had a limited degree of autonomy in the sense that it actually initiated bargaining on many issues and developed strategies. To be effective, however, the action of the JSSC would have required more extensive support from the individual unions, which were jealous of their autonomy. The senior shop stewards constituted a more select body of representatives which met top managers on an ad hoc basis. It could be compared to an executive committee within the broader legislative body. The major difference between these two shop steward bodies was that in the smaller one the experienced TGWU convenor was on his own to represent the majority of manual workers. When a particular problem occurred, management had the option of convening one representative body or the other, depending on the strategy adopted. Evans (1980:88) suggested

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33. The chairman of the JSSC was the only EETPU steward in the company; his election represented a compromise between the two rival unions (GMWU and TGWU). None of the elected jobs was held by the majority union (GMWU) at the time of observation.

that 'where identifiable problems required specific remedies, the tendency was to approach the senior stewards before the JSSC. Where the problem had broader and still less-defined implications, the JSSC would be expected to carry the message back to the membership.' We noted, however, that in the case of domestic bargaining on the issue of the engineering strike in September 1979, management initiated the discussion on principles with the senior stewards and then went further, with more detailed proposals, to the JSSC with whom they reached an agreement.

This brief discussion on hierarchy has centred so far on the formal structure within the union organisations. It is relevant to note that there also existed in Firm B a close network of experienced stewards who represented the dominant influence within the TGWU organisation. From our observation it appeared that a group of four moderate shop stewards had an overwhelming influence in defining the orthodoxy of the TGWU organisation in terms of policies and strategy. All were working as press operators in the late sixties and they were also very involved in the militant action which characterised the period. They had been shop stewards for all (or most) of the period since. The convenor was the leader and he could rely on the complete loyalty of the other members of the group as well as a majority of the other TGWU shop stewards. At the end of the fieldwork, two other members of the group were deputy convenor and secretary of the TGWU shop stewards' committee (as well as branch secretary). Hence they occupied three of the five TGWU posts on the JSSC. While the fourth shop steward was not so involved and influential within the steward body, he had been the branch chairman for some years. These stewards, who had developed close personal links over the years, were also part of the small nucleus of members who regularly attended the branch meetings.

While there were significant political differences between these

four shop stewards, they shared similar trade union principles, which could be characterised as a moderate but independent form of trade union action. For various reasons, several of the more militant TGWU stewards left the Company in 1979 and 1980 (and one renounced his steward's credential in 1978). But the majority had always been likely to follow the leadership of the moderates. The strong bargaining relationships of this moderate leadership with middle and senior management helped to keep those not 'falling in line' out of some of the discussions and to limit what they could achieve on substantive matters. It could be argued that the TGWU leadership and management had a mutual interest in isolating the minority of militant stewards, or at least in making sure that their position would not be supported within the organisation.

Constitutionalism. The two shop steward organisations invariably gave full support to the new procedural framework and saw major benefits in working within it. This support of the 'rules of the game' came mainly from the 'centre' of the organisations. This meant, first, that there was an overwhelming belief within the ranks of the shop stewards of the majority union (as opposed to those of the 'skilled workers' unions') in each factory that the new set of procedures (especially the disputes procedures and status quo) had benefited the workforce. Secondly, the commitment to the structure of labour relations was likely to be stronger within the group of shop stewards and union officials that had been most involved in the negotiation of this institutional framework. In short, there was strong evidence that the authorship of rules (Terry, 1977) had a positive influence on the subsequent commitment to procedural as well as substantive rules. For instance, at a GMWU branch meeting in Firm A in October 1978, nobody supported a shop steward from the foundry when he was disciplined by the Regional Officer for submitting a petition of his

members asking for a foundry differential and claiming separate negotiating arrangements. The full-time official used this type of authoritarian argument: 'We have signed a procedural agreement with the Company and I will not tolerate a breach of agreement . . . Any shop steward who tries to go against an agreement with the Company will face a Regional Committee.' Such a process was also observed by Purcell (1979a:17-18):

> Once the reforms were achieved, it was noticeable that the negotiators felt they were the 'custodians' (as some of them put it) of the new order. There was a preparedness to defend the system in the event of action by a minority group. In four cases, the JSSC put extensive pressure on management to dissuade them from negotiating on unauthorised sectional pay claims. They indicated that, if management did so, the new framework of industrial relations would be shattered . . . In two cases, the majority trade unions and their members appeared willing to allow management to sack a militant shop steward who had sought to render the new scheme unworkable.

With such a high degree of 'constitutional' commitment to the procedural framework, the unions' representatives contributed to the legitimacy of the process of decision-making over work relations and reinforced the position of the senior shop stewards, the 'masters in procedure'. In the TGWU shop stewards' committee Minutes books (Firm B) there were references indicating that the convenor repeatedly insisted on the need for shop stewards to act within procedure.[34] At a meeting held in September 1978,

> Convenor reminded stewards that they were bound by the Procedure Agreement and had in this case been in breach of it. He felt, aside from the merit of the case, too many stewards are not following procedure. It is a good agreement that has protected the members' jobs in some cases, and continuity of work in others. Several stewards expressed the opinion that the Company also used it to drag out arguments and not to be in any hurry to resolve them. That stewards

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34. Here is a typical entry: 'Bro [convenor] stressed the need for shop stewards to honour and work within the procedure agreement.' Minutes book, meeting held on 8 April 1974.

> were not wrong in bending agreements to suit them whenever they could.[35]

The final part of this quotation suggests that there was some discussion within the shop stewards' committee on this issue. It appears, however, that, as was often the case on other issues, the convenor considered such a critical position on the part of some of the TGWU stewards as a challenge to his personal leadership. The following extract from the Minutes book illustrates this point:

> Bro [convenor] spoke of sections denying him his rights as Convenor, and also of setters' steward by-passing recognised procedure. After a long discussion on proper procedures being adhered to and recognition of the Convenor position in these procedures, a unanimous vote of confidence was afforded Bro [convenor].[36]

Such an allegiance to procedure within the shop steward organisation was also observed at Firm A where sectional groups and individual stewards had little chance to get the support of the broader organisation if they were in breach of procedure. Two further effects of this strong commitment to procedure are relevant. First, it involved the shop stewards, and especially the senior stewards, in the process of 'sparing' the use of sanctions. Here is evidence of this occurring at Firm B:

> Copper Block Section had said that no more setting would be done as a protest against ranking in the Pecking Order. Senior stewards talked to the men and said that procedures were being broken. After discussions, working returned to normal.[37]

> External transport drivers in dispute due to Company not upholding an agreement in relation to transport and Exhold Depot. After meeting Senior Management, problem resolved. Convenor pointed out to Section if Procedure had been used correctly, men would not have lost time.[38]

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35. TGWU shop stewards' committee Minutes book, meeting held on 13 September 1978.
36. ibid., meeting held on 6 November 1972.
37. ibid., meeting held on 1 April 1974.
38. ibid., meeting held on 11 February 1976.

This type of senior shop stewards' involvement in the regulation of conflict, which was observed in both firms, was generally based on two major arguments, besides the intrinsic value of acting in conformity with the structure of joint regulation. These were the advantages of not losing money (the argument of the costs of sanctions referred to in the above quotation), and protecting unity within the organisation, considering that 'any sectional strike action could endanger the organization's unity and strength' (Batstone, Boraston and Frenkel, 1978:61, also 57).

The other effect of constitutionalism arose from the status quo clause. The general commitment to this principle effectively contributed to reducing the frequency of spontaneous stoppages. Indeed, several shop stewards from Firm B argued in interviews that, apart from naturally perishable issues (mainly concerning health and safety), the need for spontaneous action no longer existed as it did before. The following are short extracts from these interviews:

> The beauty of the procedure agreement is that when there's disagreement on a job, they will normally find alternative work to do in the meantime.[39]

> Technically you should never have to go on strike because even when a man is dismissed . . . he carries on working.[40]

In the two case studies there was also some evidence of a cause and effect relationship between strong bargaining relationships and the reduction of the frequency of strike action and other overt sanctions (Brown, 1973: 134-5; Batstone, Boraston and Frenkel, 1978:38-9, 44). It could be suggested, however, that the relationship may also be turned around, in

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39. Interview with Press shop no. 4 (TGWU) shop steward, 3 October 1979. A similar viewpoint was also expressed by the TGWU shop steward of the Copper core section (20 September 1979).

40. Interview with TGWU convenor, 25 October 1979.

the sense that a successful record with respect to conflict regulation may represent a good asset for a shop steward to develop strong bragaining relationships.

Control and discipline. It has been shown that an increasing degree of centralisation of power within the organisations as well as the emergence of a form of constitutionalism followed the industrial relations reforms. It is now necessary to explore whether the development of the new institutional framework coincided with the emergence of a higher degree of control and discipline within the shop-floor organisations. There was little evidence of this change in Firm A. Power was diffuse within the organisation and the lack of co-ordination and leadership was obvious on many occasions during the fieldwork; for example, during the 1979 pay negotiation as well as during the skilled workers' strike in February 1979. The JSSC was a fragmented and fragile body, a fact most shop stewards were very aware of.[41] The shop stewards had only worked together since 1974, they had had a long tradition of union rivalry, and the JSSC regrouped representatives of two factories with significant differences concerning the working conditions and the characteristics of the workforce. In such a context, rigorous control and discipline were hardly possible within the organisation. What sometimes occurred, however, was that some of the shop stewards brought pressure to bear on a few rebel shop stewards. In addition, the GMWU convenor occasionally directed a verbal attack against an individual or a small group of shop stewards.

The situation was different at Firm B. The operation of the different

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41. It was possible to attend many JSSC meetings during the 1979 negotiation. There was little reference to internal procedure, no proper recording of minutes, and the lack of co-ordination impeded the elaboration of collective policies and strategies. There is no doubt that this organisation did not constitute an integrated shop steward body as defined by Brown (1973:139).

structures within the shop stewards organisation (JSSC, TGWU and AUEW shop stewards' committees, NUSMW shop committee meetings, etc.) facilitated a greater respect for internal procedure. There appeared to be a strong tradition of collective discipline and co-ordination. It must be stressed, however, that the JSSC was not a strong and united shop steward body in this workplace either. Interviews with senior representatives of the TGWU, AUEW, and NUSMW demonstrated that the JSSC remained a fragile body which had to cope with a long tradition of union autonomy and rivalry.[42] The friction existed mainly between the TGWU and the 'skilled unions'. Besides the tinsmiths (NUSMW), who were a small but very independent group of trade unionists, the resistance to a collective definition of union action came mainly from the toolmakers (AUEW). Individual interviews with the shop steward and three other members of the toolroom committee clearly showed how little commitment they had to JSSC policies.[43] They felt very strongly about their skilled status and saw little identity of interests with the TGWU members, and especially with the large group of press operators (the stronghold of the latter organisation). For instance, they would certainly not accept a pay deal imposed on them by a majority vote of the whole shop-floor organisation.

Within the TGWU organisation, however, a degree of internal control and discipline was observed. The shop stewards' committee weekly meeting offered the convenor the opportunity to discipline any shop steward who had broken a union rule or principle, usually with the support of other STEWARDS,

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42. Interviews were conducted on 23 October, 1 November and 15 October 1979. On two occasions in 1979 the very existence of the JSSC amounted to very little, i.e. during the pay negotiation and later during the national engineering strike.

43. The structured interviews with the three shop committee members were held on 17 and 19 September 1979. Several informal interviews were conducted with the toolroom shop steward.

At one meeting we attended in August 1979, the shop steward of the Dravo section (Heating division) was reprimanded for having spoken against the collective position of the shop stewards at a factory meeting on the question of the support for the engineering strike. The account of this event is worth quoting at some length:

> There followed a long discussion in which Bro [convenor] pointed out that as stewards we represent more than our own immediate members, we also have a responsibility to the union and its policies. Bro [the steward concerned] repeated the point he made at the factory meeting that he felt we should be asking the officials for dispensation for [Firm B]. He was strongly criticised by Bro E for speaking against the shop stewards' recommendation to which he was party, and on a subject he had received no support for when he raised it the previous meeting. Bro [convenor] said that as shop stewards we have no option but to recommend support. Bro C. said that shop stewards can have their say at the stewards meeting, and vote, but they must then abide by the majority decision.[44]

Two union principles which were widely shared within the TGWU shop steward organisation are referred to in the above quotation. The first was that shop stewards did not only represent the section which elected them, they were also part of the domestic organisation and accredited representatives of the broader union movement. This may be called the principle of double allegiance. The second was the principle of collective responsibility. It meant that once the majority decision had been taken, the minority had to rally behind the collective decision, with no right to dissent at mass meetings or in front of management.[45] Here is some evidence showing that

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44. TGWU shop stewards' committee Minutes book, meeting held on 29 August 1979.

45. In the case referred to here, the TGWU shop stewards' committee had voted 16 for, 15 against, with one abstention, on the proposal to support the national strike movement. At the mass meeting held one week later, the workforce voted by a strong majority against the JSSC recommendation to follow the strike call. On the crucial importance of the shop stewards' support for the national engineering strike, and the loyalty of most stewards to their national union in spite of workers' reluctance, see Edwards and Scullion (1982b:58-63).

this rule existed as far back as 1971:

> Complaint of stewards who are part of a recommendation speaking against it at a mass meeting. It was felt that once a vote had been taken at stewards meeting all stewards should be a party to that decision. It was proposed that after a vote the meeting should then endorse that decision so that when a recommendation by the stewards was passed unanimous, then no steward should speak against the decision.[46]

From the information presented so far in this section, the general trend was one of centralisation within the shop steward organisations and of institutionalisation of workplace union action. In the following section, the attention focuses on the opposite or contradictory trend, with particular consideration of the forces which fostered decentralisation and resistance to institutionalisation.

3.3 Resistance to Institutionalisation Within Workplace Organisations

Members' control over the organisations. Michael Terry has suggested that within workplace union organisations in the engineering industry 'there has been a shift of analytical emphasis from what Hyman terms control for workers to control over workers'.[47] This proposition is not supported by the findings of the two case studies. The evidence presented in this chapter shows that these two dimensions of control effectively existed in the workplace organisations, but the emphasis had not been reversed to control over workers. The organisations were still primarily 'a medium of power for workers to exert control over their jobs' (Hyman, 1975:73).

Indeed, the relatively high degree of members' control over their domestic organisations represented one of the main factors of resistance

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46. TGWU shop stewards' committee Minutes book, 2 March 1971. One also finds reference to this rule in the minutes of the meeting held on 11 January 1971.

47. Published in Sociologie du travail (1979:389). Hyman's argument on discipline and control within organisations, which was presented at the beginning of section 3, broadly corresponds to the proposition quoted here.

to the institutionalisation of union action. In both cases, although more significantly in Firm B, this resistance came from below. In this respect one should not overlook the many facets of the shop steward-member relations (Batstone, 1979:12-19). The two shop-floor organisations had preserved a strong commitment to the democratic rule, with ideological references to the principles of delegation from below, sectional autonomy, and even to direct democracy. At micro level, members' controls over the elected representatives were both spontaneous and manyfold.[48] More important than the electoral process is the fact thal all shop stewards, except for one at Firm B, worked on the shop-floor and were very much in touch with members' feelings in their own constituency. Therefore shop stewards' autonomy from the rank and file should not be exaggerated, at least from the evidence of these two engineering firms. Moreover, it will be shown later that shop-floor workers generally protected their job control and shop rules against any joint or management incursion from above. On this point Evans' account (1980:109) corresponds with our own observation in the same firm (case B):

> Management strategy demands a more centralised control over the membership, and a more effective response to this strategy necessitates such control. But the leadership is ambivalent about assuming this authority. The main reason for this, we have seen, is the continuing resistance by workers to surrendering whatever autonomy they have within their relations with management and other workers.

The local basis of shop steward action. In spite of the reforms in the structure of labour relations, the representative function of most shop stewards was performed mainly at the level of their section or

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48. Hyman's argument on the two-way process of control was illustrated with reference to union officials (1975:73). Hence he pointed out that 'they are the employees and the servants of the members, who are thus in appropriate situations entitled to exert control over them'. Arguably this dimension of the control system is even more significant if applied with reference to the shop stewards.

or constituency. It dealt primarily with job control, 'the rate for the job', and working conditions. Although the scope of bargaining had increased at factory and company level, there was still a lot of bargaining going on at the shop-floor where the ordinary shop steward finds his power basis. As Batstone pointed out, 'workplace bargaining is still dominantly an informal activity' (1979:19; see also Terry, 1977), because of the need to adapt to specific work processes and working conditions. Indeed, if a greater adherence to procedure favours centralisation and the elaboration of universal and more formal rules, the need to adapt to the specificity of the work process fosters decentralisation and informality. This suggests that in looking at the impact of institutionalisation on the shop steward organisations, a distinction must be made between the centre of the organisations and the ordinary shop stewards.

At Firm B, two poles of shop steward representation had developed which broadly corresponded to the levels of bargaining. On the one hand, the senior shop stewards and the JSSC negotiated a floor of rights through the institutional framework at factory level. They tried to co-ordinate union action so that collective interests would predominate over sectional ones. On the other hand, the principle of sectional autonomy was recognised for the protection of job control and other shop-floor matters, in relation to specific contributions to the work process. The distinction was not so clear in Firm A because the shop steward organisation was weaker at shop-floor level and the hierarchy less developed within the stewards ranks.

The persistence of sectionalism. In the two firms the most serious impediment to the institutionalisation of labour relations was the predominance of sectionalism. A large part of shop-floor action to develop and preserve job control was still conducted on a sectional basis. An

attempt is made here to illustrate how the pervasiveness of sectionalism caused serious problems of co-ordination within the union side and could impede the smooth working of the institutional framework at company level. To this end, brief reference is made to particular events which occurred in the two firms during the 1979 pay negotiations.

The negotiations had followed the usual pattern at Firm A when the majority of manual workers voted for the acceptance of the company's final offer (it was the third round of mass meetings, held on 16 January 1979). However, the majority of AUEW and EETPU members (at a separate meeting) rejected it, being particularly dissatisfied with the proposals on the indirect incentive scheme. With the tacit support of the GMWU and TGWU stewards, management insisted that the rule of the overall majority should prevail, and the company implemented the new conditions.

This eventually led to a seven-day strike by a group of about seventy AUEW and EETPU members in February 1979. The other unions refused to give any support to the strike. Since the AUEW and EETPU did not represent all skilled workers (and few of them at Factory 1), the impact of the strike on production was minimal. Interestingly, management insisted on discussing the issue with the whole JSSC and not exclusively with the strikers' representatives. Management's argument was that the two general unions also had members covered by the indirect incentive scheme and, more importantly, that the JSSC was the institution representing the workers' collective interests within the company. This meant that thirteen shop stewards representing members refusing to give any support to the strikers were involved in two days of negotiation, together with the three stewards directly involved and management. Our informants explained that the 'neutral' shop stewards did not really put pressure on the company but helped to formulate a possible compromise, i.e. a reference to ACAS for arbitration. The outcome did not solve any of the skilled

workers' problems: the dispute never reached the stage of an arbitration hearing because the four unions could not agree on the terms of reference under which they could collectively go to arbitration. When the AUEW requested to go to arbitration on its own, management categorically refused.

Apart from being a rather extreme example of lack of union co-ordination and solidarity, this was also a case in which management succeeded in channelling a sectional dispute through the institutional framework. By doing so management also protected the authority of the JSSC at a time when the shop-floor organisation was paradoxically showing a lack of collective spirit and solidarity. This last point of strategy was also observed at Firm B during the national engineering strike, when management took all possible measures to prevent the collapse of the JSSC. It must be pointed out, however, that in the case of a more robust shop-floor organisation (as in Firm B) it is much more difficult for management to integrate sectional disputes within the structure of labour relations at company level.

The 1979 pay negotiations at Firm B also provide some evidence of sectional resistance to institutionalisation. Although according to procedure the JSSC was mandated to negotiate the pay deal, it did not have the strength and autonomy to achieve an agreement without sectional bargaining being conducted with particular sections and occupational groups. The JSSC was not able to submit a collective claim, indeed the stewards could hardly agree on a collective demand even within the TGWU ranks. Consequently they negotiated on the basis of management's terms.[49] Another

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49. To quote one of the leaders of the JSSC, 'you're pleased when you see an offer to discuss'. Interview, 25 October 1979.

interesting characteristic of the bargaining process at Firm B was the mode of acceptance of the agreement which, up to 1980, was done on a sectional or occupational group basis.[50] Hence, the TGWU might hold a mass meeting to inform the members, but the votes were taken within the sections. Indeed, it was on the basis of such votes within each section that the JSSC recommendation to accept management's proposals was turned down by the members in April 1979. At a later stage, many sections and occupational groups accepted the pay deal while a minority of sections (and of the members) were waiting for a Works Conference to be held on 6 June.[51] In the meantime, it was jointly agreed that the groups which had settled would be paid according to their new rate, as was the practice in this factory (a situation which obviously further reduced the bargaining power of the minority sections). In the course of 1979, nineteen different upgrading claims went through procedure (Evans, 1980: 52), many of them reaching the stage of Works Conference. They had little support from the TGWU convenor and the JSSC, and none of these groups made significant progress. Later in 1979, differential problems became so acute that management took the initiative to give 'every section within the Company . . . the opportunity to state a case for a differential review'.[52]

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50. In a document prepared by the personnel director for the attention of JSSC members in December 1979, it is stressed that 'for the 1980 settlement and thereafter, acceptance of any general pay deal or change in terms and conditions of employment will need to be on a union by union basis (and not section by section - or, as in 1979, sometimes a motley collection of sections). It would be better to make all such issues decided by a ballot of the total workforce, but this may be seen as conflicting with individual Union autonomy.' Management document, 19 December 1979, p. 4.

51. A management source confirmed that this Works Conference had been arranged mainly in order to give the JSSC more power in relation to the sections refusing the deal. Interview, May 1980.

52. Management document, 19 December 1979, p. 1.

As a result of this, six of the twenty-nine sections who had argued for a better ranking within the wage structure got some improvement.

The source of this sectional resistance now deserves some attention. Why did the identification with sectional interests predominate over more collective ones? The analysis of Steve Evans (1980), based on research conducted at Firm B, is used here as a starting point as it explored the resurgence of sectional interests and the lack of collective strategy and resistance. Two steps in his argument can be distinguished. First, it is observed that in a situation where the objective conditions fostered and required a more collective response (p. 106) the shop stewards failed to ensure the predominance of these collective interests (pp. 58, 77, 85). Secondly, it is suggested that the procedural reform significantly contributed to limiting further the identity and representation of collective interests. One of the ways the institutional reform did so, it is argued, was in reducing the intensity of conflict at the shop-floor.

Here is the most explicit statement of this:

> As result of management's encouragement of an improved bargaining relationship, the stewards came to play a greater role in the organisation of production. This had the effect of restricting the coercive aspect of supervision and protecting the 'autonomy' of the operators within the work process. The reduction in conflict this produced, fragmented the collective cohesiveness of the operators and their stewards. (Evans, 1980:85; see also 84)

The first part of the argument corresponds totally with our own observation, while the second is more open to discussion. Although it is quite true that the reform did not produce a higher degree of shop-floor cohesiveness at Firm B, it does not necessarily follow that it fostered a higher degree of fragmentation. Before the reform shop-floor resistance was also very sectional.

Evans correctly put emphasis on major attitudinal causes for this lack of cohesiveness. Most important were the limited perspective of the

operators and their dominant preoccupation with 'making the job pay' (pp. 63, 85, 107), as also the lack of strategy and leadership within a group of shop stewards 'essentially responsive to events' (p. 91; also 109-10). It may be suggested, however, that Evans gave too little attention to the structural causes of sectionalism. These objective factors, over which the shop-floor organisations had little control, were independent of the institutional framework.

Only a brief reference to these structural causes, which are not the specific focus of our case studies, is relevant at this stage. The first point is that the fundamental cause of the division between workers lies in the division of labour. The structures of trade unionism and labour relations, as well as management policies, are some of the factors which may reduce or exacerbate this division (between workers). It is nevertheless the case that the definition of sectional interests within the workplace usually corresponds to the worker contribution to the work process. In the companies studied, two factors contributed significantly to sharpening the division between different groups of workers. One was the payment systems and the related problems of differentials. In these two organisations, the different sections of the workforce were particularly preoccupied with their respective positions in the internal wage structure. The other factor was multi-unionism. Although the unions worked much more closely with each other as a result of the reform, the evidence presented in this section shows that multi-unionism remained an important factor of division. The point is that each union represented particular segments of the workforce (with union jurisdiction corresponding to different shifts and factories at Firm A). The principle of union autonomy was still very significant, especially at Firm B.

The pattern of shop steward representation prevailing at Firm B, where shop stewards represented a group of workers performing a particular

type of task (usually within a specific section) was also a very important contributory factor to the persistence of sectionalism. The shop steward was the guardian of the interests of workers performing specific functions and his power was based on sectional interests. As has been suggested in Chapter 3, this pattern may be more appropriate for the protection of job control. Hence the paradox is that while trade unionism is about the reduction of the division between workers in order to defend collective interests, it appears that an efficient organisation for the defence of these interests at the point of production is bound to reflect the division of labour and sectional interests.

This pattern of shop steward representation based on the decomposition of labour did not exist at Firm A. This factor is seen as one of the main reasons why the resistance to institutionalisation was weaker at Firm A. Yet it does not follow that there was less sectionalism within the shop-floor organisation in the latter case. There was another specific factor which reduced the cohesiveness of the organisation. It was the fact that members of the same domestic union organisation worked in separate factories on different sites. The integration of the workforce of the two factories for trade union and collective bargaining purposes represented a strategic advantage for management because of the close integration of the work processes. As for the workers' side, however, the working conditions were quite different and there were little mobility and few community links between the foundry and the machine shops employees. This social distance was also enhanced by the characteristics of the workforce. A majority of the foundry workers were immigrants, while the immigrant population represented no more than 10 or 12 per cent of the workforce at Factory II.

To sum up, the argument of this sub-section is that sectionalism was predominantly caused by objective conditions which were independent of

the institutional reform. Hence it is suggested that sectionalism had not intensified as a result of the reform. Indeed, the overall influence of institutionalisation might have slightly reduced its intensity within these workplaces. The point is, however, that the reform had made it more manifest because it was in sharp conflict with the rationale of the new management strategies and policies.

4. CONFLICT BETWEEN TWO RATIONALES FOR DECISION-MAKING

This chapter has emphasised the contrast between managerial strategies to institutionalise labour relations and the strong commitment of shop-floor workers to sectional autonomy. Management rationality stemmed from the broad objectives of institutionalising conflict and achieving greater control over work relations. By contrast, shop-floor rationality was defined in relation to the workers' objective of consolidating and preserving relative control over the utilisation of their labour at the point of production. To achieve this, the power basis of these shop steward organisations was mainly grounded on sectional interests. This model of shop-floor democracy was particularly adequate to protect the specific working conditions of particular groups of workers. This analysis is consistent with the argument of Kahn-Freund (1979:3-26), who placed much emphasis on the notion of 'direct democracy'. From a different perspective, Harrison (1981:55) also stressed that 'sectionalism is one of the oldest traditions of the British trade union movement'. Regardless of the impact of sectionalism on job control (a question studied at a later stage), such a degree of fragmentation within the workers' organisation was certainly detrimental to the management strategy for reform and indeed to management control in general. It was an element of destabilisation in the sense that it did not fit into the new management approach to labour relations. In sum,

the workforce resisted the institutionalisation of workplace relations on two grounds. Workers were certainly unwilling to give up the relative control over labour utilisation they had acquired locally and gradually. But they were also reluctant to accept a high degree of centralisation and control within their own organisation, notably because this would have been inconsistent with the pattern of union government which had developed in well organised engineering factories.

To put this argument in simple terms, management wished to reinforce control (over work relations) from above while the shop-floor was committed to the protection of its relative control from below. Two contrasting models of organisation correspond with these rationales for decision-making. Management structure follows the principle of devolution of authority from the top (hierarchical model) while the shop-floor organisation elects and mandates with circumspection its delegates from below (democratic model).

One of the consequences of institutionalisation is the centralisation of decision-making along the lines of management hierarchy. While this is an advantage from a management viewpoint, shop-floor democracy is more compatible with decision-making at the most decentralised level. It was also seen that the preoccupation with job control and other conditions related to the work process fosters decentralisation. Consequently, it is suggested that institutionalisation of workplace labour relations goes against some of the fundamental principles of this model of shop-floor democracy. Decision-making through the institutional framework progressively attacks the workplace union organisation at its weakest point and puts pressure on union democracy and solidarity. Within this perspective, the lack of strategy and collective outlook of the shop-floor organisations observed in these case studies may be explained to some extent. Indeed,

this suggests that their organisational basis precluded the development of a much stronger degree of cohesiveness at company level.

CHAPTER 6

WORKER CONTROL OVER DEPLOYMENT OF LABOUR

Chapters 6 and 7 focus on the empirical study of job control following the institutional reform, the main features of which were presented in the two preceding chapters. The main purpose is to portray and analyse the importance of worker control over different aspects of work. To achieve this, and contribute to the central arguments of the dissertation, three more precise objectives are set out at this stage.

The first objective is to confront the difficult task of drawing an outline of the frontier of control. In his classic study conducted in 1919-20, Goodrich stressed this central question in these terms: 'what is the present extent, and what are the boundaries, of workers' control?' (1975:51). The following passage is indicative of his conception of the notion of 'frontier of control':

> At what point does the employer say - beyond this there shall be no discussion, the rest is my business alone? The line is a hard one to draw; the issues are rarely thought out in the abstract and rarely presented dramatically. The real frontier, like most lines in industry, is more a matter of accepted custom than of precisely stated principle. (1975:56)

Proper appreciation of the frontier of control rests on information on both the range and the degree of control. The question of the degree of control, while more difficult to investigate and assess properly, is the most crucial if one is attempting to gauge the real extent of the incursion of shop-floor workers into decision-making on labour utilisation. Consequently it deserves more careful attention in this research. The second objective of Chapters 6 and 7 is to compare the frontier of control in the companies studied and seek to explain the different patterns which were observed. This should be possible by studying carefully the forces

which appear to be most influential on the pattern of control, notably the work process, the shop-floor organisation, and the managerial structure and strategies. Finally, the third objective is to provide much of the empirical data on the impact of the institutionalisation of labour relations on job control, the primary question of this dissertation.

Before presenting the information on control over deployment of labour, the first section of this chapter deals mainly with analytical considerations related to the concepts of job control and work process. The intention is to develop the tools which are necessary to conduct empirical research and analysis on this matter.

1. ANALYTICAL TOOLS FOR THE EMPIRICAL STUDY OF JOB CONTROL

1.1 The Contours and Definition of Job Control

In the analytical framework presented in Chapter 1 some emphasis was put on the centrality of the notion of control in industry and on the significance of the issue of job control in contemporary labour relations in Britain. The need here is to develop a more precise definition of job control, one which may be conducive to observation in the workplace and analysis.

The concept of job control, which holds some historical significance, encompasses two related but distinct aspects of trade union and shop-floor action. The first aspect is control over access to jobs and their protection, i.e. the question of the supply of labour, while the other is control over the utilisation of labour in the work process, once it has been hired. In fact, the distinction corresponds to 'the two elements of the employment relationship - the sale of labour power and the control of the labour process' (Hyman, 1980:304). Before going further on the basis of this distinction, it is important to stress how these aspects are closely linked.

On the one hand, trade union devices for control over labour supply, whatever their rationale, contribute to reinforcing the power basis of the workforce in the relation of subordination. On the other hand, it was observed that one of the justifications for some form of shop-floor control over deployment of labour, manning levels, job demarcation, and intensity of effort is the protection of the volume of labour in a particular trade, section, or department. Indeed, in this perspective, lay-off and redundancies may be considered as the ultimate threat to all forms of job control. According to the analytical framework presented in Chapter 1, the workers' need to carry on selling their labour is one of the objective bases of the structural interdependence between the parties, which is itself conducive to accommodation. In theory, one would therefore expect that the important reduction in the labour force of these two enterprises in the late seventies, in the context of increasingly high levels of unemployment, would foster accommodation and attenuate conflict over labour utilisation in the work process.

It is interesting to recall that the classic work of Perlman on the theory of trade unionism and job control focused on control over the supply of labour. Hence the 'consciousness of scarcity of opportunity' fostered a type of job control very much centred upon access to jobs, its protection and what he termed the 'rules of occupancy and tenure' (1928: 6-10, 237-69). It appears that the sophisticated control of the International Typographical Union over labour supply also constituted the power basis of their members as regards the determination of wages and various aspects of labour utilisation, a secondary objective of the model of unionism advocated by Perlman. Although the author is vague and unspecific on this point, there are interesting references to "shop rights", which, to the workingman at the bench, are identical with "liberty" itself, -

- since, thanks to them, he has no need to kowtow to foreman or boss, as the price of holding his job' (1928:275).

In his important work on job control in the United States, Herding adopts a definition which is broad enough to cover the two elements of the distinction. He writes:

> Deviating from a narrow use of the concept that would only include control over access to the job and its security, I shall imply in the term as well any control of the work content . . . So 'job control' will refer to all devices of labor union influence on the existence of, the access to, and the performance of operations at particular work-places in industry. (1972:2)

In his lectures to the British Academy, Kahn-Freund put great emphasis on job control, one of the 'two centrally important characteristics of British labour relations' (1979:3). He also worked on the basis of a distinction between 'the regulation of the volume of output, the allocation and distribution of work among workers and categories of workers, and the closely linked regulations of the supply in the labour market and of access to jobs' (1979:35, 32-9).

While giving proper consideration to the close relation between these two aspects of job control, the position adopted in this research consists of placing the emphasis on control over labour utilisation in the work process. It certainly is a complex area to investigate. However, it has the advantage of directing attention to the crucial problem of the transformation of labour power into effort in the work process. This was pointed out as the real object of the struggle for control in the workplace, and the structural basis of conflict (see also Edwards and Scullion, 1982a: 1-9). From a different perspective, and starting from the distinction between market and managerial relations (Flanders, 1975:88; Fox, 1966:6-7 and 1971:158), it may be pointed out that the utilisation of labour once it has been hired is the area in which management is likely to resist worker interference most convincingly. The following excerpts are clear expressions

of this reality:

> In general, managements have been far readier to negotiate on 'employment contract' norms than on 'utilization' norms. In other words they have been readier to negotiate with employees about the terms on which they are to be hired than about how they are utilized and deployed once they have been hired. (Fox, 1971:158)

> When unionism meets managerial prerogatives there is a clash of 'rights'. If unionism confines itself to the regulation of wage rates (the price at which labour power will be sold or leased), then this clash can be averted. But when organized labour seeks to influence the <u>way</u> in which labour power is utilized then it confronts the essence of managerial function: the planning, commanding and controlling of factors of production. (Storey, 1980:19)

It follows that worker inroads into the area of labour utilization represents a strategic point of observation. However, it still encompasses a reality which is too broad to constitute an adequate working definition of job control. A classic distinction put forward by the Webbs in <u>Industrial Democracy</u> will suggest how the focus of our analysis may be narrowed down.

> The interminable series of decisions, which together make up industrial administration, fall into three main classes. There is, first, the decision as to what shall be produced - that is to say, the exact commodity or service to be supplied to the consumers. There is, secondly, the judgment as to the manner in which the production shall take place, the adoption of material, the choice of processes, and the selection of human agents. Finally, there is the altogether different question of the conditions under which these human agents shall be employed - the temperature, atmosphere, and sanitary arrangements amid which they shall work, the intensity and duration of their toil and the wages given as its reward (S. and B. Webb, 1902:818).[1]

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1. This is a central distinction in the concluding chapter on 'Trade Unionism and Democracy', first published in 1897. The Webbs' argument is that 'the special function of the Trade Union in the administration of industry' has to do with the third class of decisions, i.e. working conditions (pp. 820-22). This discussion is reproduced in the concluding section of the 1920 edition of their <u>History of Trade Unionism</u> (pp. 752-63).

Although the decisions of the second category obviously have an impact on working conditions (a point considered by the authors, p. 820), it seems that the classification still remains fundamental. This is particularly so for the distinction between 'the choice of processes', or 'how' to produce, and the decisions relating to working conditions. Starting from this, it is useful to draw an analytical distinction between the <u>way</u> labour power is utilised in the work process and the <u>conditions</u> of utilisation which include, for instance, the physical working conditions. Again, it may be stressed that the way labour is utilised by management constitutes the most problematic area with respect to the frontier of control. Indeed, the Webbian prescription that this category of decisions should be left 'to the expert knowledge of the directors of industry' is indicative in this respect (1902:819-20).[2] Hence, in this research, job control is defined as the restraints imposed by workers on the way their labour power is utilised in the work process by management.

In this dissertation, attention focuses mainly on issues such as labour mobility, job demarcation, manning levels, and many questions related to the effort bargain. This leads to the question of the intensity of effort during labour time, a crucial area of research on which it is, however, very difficult for the outside observer to get evidence. Nevertheless, starting from an analytical distinction between immediate work pace and continuity of effort, a number of shop rules and practices will be discussed. In many workshops these practices amount to a significant degree of worker control over effort.

Hence our study is directed mainly at issues related directly to the

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2. The authors noted, however, that this prescription was 'subject to one all-important qualification'. Since the democratic state was interested in the conditions of the working lives of manual workers, 'the bias of the directors of industry in favor of cheapness has, in the interests of the community, to be perpetually controlled and guided by a determination to maintain, and progressively to raise, the conditions of employment' (1902:819-20).

labour process as opposed to other interesting issues such as hiring and firing, and redundancies. In spite of the importance of and interest in the latter type of issues, they are not so central to the working definition of job control adopted here. And for more pragmatic reasons we had to focus on a relatively limited range of issues to reach the depth which is necessary to develop the general argument of the dissertation on the impact of reformism on control over labour utilisation.

1.2 The Concept of Work Process and Empirical Research

One of the main characteristics of the conceptual framework developed in Chapter 1 is the identification of the work process as the starting-point for the study of workplace labour relations. It was suggested that the structure of labour relations (the subject of Chapters 4 and 5) could be viewed as a superstructure with reference to work relations, itself defined as the relational aspect of the labour process. Before proceeding to the empirical data on job control, it is therefore appropriate to be more specific on the use of the work process as a tool of analysis.

Regardless of the merit of the argument about the importance of the work process, the difficulty of using it in empirical research remains. In other words, the task is to give it a value for operational purposes. For instance, technology is not a useful concept in this respect. The latter is actually a confusing term, since 'it may refer either to the pieces of machinery within a plant or to a broader set of factors which include technical knowledge and social organization as well as the physical equipment employed' (Batstone, Boraston and Frenkel, 1978:27). In contrast, a piece of machinery or equipment, or the integration between different work stations, may be observed. Therefore, an effort is made here to single out four concrete indicators (or characteristics) of the work process, before going on to assess their real impact on job control. These

are the method of production, the type of machinery, the integration of production, and the decomposition of labour.[3]

A primary characteristic of the work process is the basic method of production. It refers to the distinction between unit fabrication, small batch, large batch, mass production, and process production. Differences in the methods of production in operation in the three factories studied were pointed out in Chapter 2,[4] and these are expected to have a significant impact on the pattern of control over production. The second characteristic to which attention is paid is the type of machinery. In the foundry, machine shops and presswork production observed, most manual workers were using the tools of their trade or operating either non-automatic or semi-automatic machines. A related indicator which is worth considering in this respect is the degree of specialisation (and the period of training) required to operate a specific type of machinery. Thirdly, in using the concept of integration of production, we have in mind two specific aspects of work. One is the degree of integration between the various operations on the product which are carried out within the plant or between the different factories of the same enterprise. The other point of attention, which deserves much consideration, is the integration between different work stations. The researcher may find separated work stations, where indirect labour has to handle the components from one work station to the other, or linked work stations, where a conveyor belt or any other mechanism transfers the components between

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3. For this part of our work some of the researches carried out in France and Britain by Pierre Dubois and other members of the Groupe de Sociologie du Travail have been of invaluable help. These have been useful at the conceptual level and also as an indication of particular aspects deserving observation and analysis. The following publications are particularly helpful: Dubois, 1978; Dubois and Monjardet, 1979. Dubois, 1980 and 1981.

4. It has to be noted that some illustration of each of the four indicators of the work process was given in Chapters 2 and 3.

stations (Dubois, 1978:175-6). The fourth aspect to which attention is directed is decomposition of labour.[5] Basically, this refers to a distinction between the different types of tasks involved in production (Dubois, 1978:175; Dubois and Monjardet, 1979:5-7). These are maintenance, setting, production, quality control, and material handling. Reference to this distinction was central in the argument about the different patterns of shop steward representation which was presented in Chapter 3. Comparative research by the Groupe de Sociologie du Travail already has provided interesting results on the impact of decomposition of labour on the different patterns of job control in France and Britain, in four industries other than engineering (Dubois and Monjardet, 1979; Dubois, 1980 and 1982).

1.3 Strategy for Research and Analysis

It seems appropriate to make explicit some of the choices of research strategy which we made and which are now guiding us in the selection and analysis of the data collected. The first of these principles is that attention is focused on a limited number of crucial issues. It was indicated earlier in this chapter that our first preoccupation concerns the degree of job control, as opposed to the range of issues under worker influence. To this purpose, it was felt more appropriate to pay relatively close attention to particular aspects of work relations rather than attempt to gather information on every aspect of shop-floor control in a factory. Secondly, and for similar reasons, it was felt more fruitful to concentrate the observation and interviewing on particular areas of production within

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5. Decomposition of labour represents one of the two main aspects of the technical division of labour, the other being 'parcellisation' of labour. For the object of this research, it is felt that decomposition may be a more fruitful and significant tool of analysis than the parent concept of 'parcellisation' of labour. This is so notably because the variation between different patterns of decomposition is relatively easier to assess by observation.

each enterprise. Accordingly, much of the discussion in these empirical chapters concerns departments and sections where it was possible to gain a better insight into work relations. At Firm B, these productive units are the press shops, the toolroom, and the Automotive Heat Transfer unit (AHT). At Firm A, much of the observation and interviewing was done in the large machine shops, and it will also be possible to make references (although in a less systematic way) to work relations in the toolroom and the foundry.

Moreover, in order to gain the most accurate account of the degree of worker control, particular attention is paid to two aspects of decision-making. One is the exact nature of the decision over which workers have some control. The point is that every general issue (such as assignment of labour, labour mobility, overtime, redundancies, etc.) includes many aspects of decision-making. The intention is to circumscribe, as much as possible, the real object of the challenge to management control. The other aspect needing careful attention is the method of worker control. In this respect, the objective is to look at the actual method by which workers impose some limits to management freedom on a specific subject. These constraints may result from unilateral regulation by the workforce, but they are more frequently the result of some form of joint or customary regulation, the line between different methods of regulation being commonly blurred in the process of control, which is essentially a power relationship (a rapport de force). As an illustration of this analytical consideration, it may be underlined that it is not an easy task to assess the actual extent of unilateral worker regulation. One of the difficulties is that what may appear to the researcher as unilateral worker control may be the protection of strategic gains obtained through collective bargaining at an earlier stage and under different conditions. For instance, the application of the 1974 agreement on a daywork system in Press shop no. 4 gave way to

the development of unilateral protective practices, where the shop-floor was sticking to the letter (if not to the spirit) of the agreement.

The possibility of gaining some insight into these two aspects of decision-making, i.e. the exact nature of the issue and the method of worker control, may be seen as one of the main advantages of the case study method for studying the frontier of control.

2. SHOP-FLOOR CONTROL OVER DEPLOYMENT OF LABOUR

In the remainder of this chapter, attention focuses on control over deployment of labour. It has to do with the constraints upon management freedom as regards the allocation of workers to jobs within a specific working area, and the whole issue of labour mobility within the plant. This empirical material is presented in three sub-sections.

For practical reasons which were set out in the opening chapter of this dissertation, the information on job control is broader in scope and somewhat more substantial in the case of Firm B. In order to make the best use of the data collected for analytical purposes, it seems appropriate to present at greater length the information collected in this firm. On most issues, it is possible to compare it with the situation prevailing in Firm A, which is often used as a contrasting case.

2.1 Assignment of Labour

The concept of assignment of labour is used here in the precise sense of allocation of labour to jobs and tasks within a particular working area. In the case of Firm B, this refers to the geographical boundaries of a section. In other words, assignment of labour encompasses the question of deployment of labour and mobility within the section. These decisions have traditionally been considered as a managerial function. Most production managers felt that they should dispose of the specific assignment of the

labour force under their jurisdiction. Indeed, this was still the general principle which underlay the management position on this issue in the factories studied. In day-to-day management, this position of principle was substantiated by an insistence on the need to respond to the pressure of the product market. For instance, the elaboration and application of the schedules of production remained very much within the scope of management control. It was also widely accepted within the workforce that the determination of the priorities in production remained a management responsibility. The situation got more problematic, however, when this planning had to be made effective in terms of labour assignment and work allocation.

Systematic interviews with shop stewards and production managers in AHT revealed that management was generally allowed to move workers freely within a section. It was also accepted that there was no need for management to consult the shop steward before asking a worker to move. This was the situation prevailing in each of the three sections making up the AHT unit, which were the tinsmith, the Fitting and Welding no. 2 and the Copper Core sections. As a general rule, the duration of the assignment was much shorter in the third section, where a high degree of flexibility was accepted by the workforce. The situation in this Copper Core section in 1979 was that workers were co-operating fully with management in order to keep the section running (and save their jobs) by making the best of an important contract on the American market. In the tinsmith area, a comparable degree of flexibility was formally agreed by indirect labour in 1978, as part of a bargain for upgrading. In a memo to senior management and shop stewards, the section manager reported:

> It has been agreed with the above operatives that they will be interchangeable at management discretion to cover each others job in the event of any absenteeism for what-

> ever reason and in any overload situation on production and in doing so will be upgraded to P.S.O.3 (Production service operative-grade 3)."[6]

It was in the toolroom and the press shops in Firm B that management power to assign labour to jobs was most severely curtailed. Interviews with managers and the four members of the toolroom committee illustrated how a comprehensive body of rules had developed at workshop level on this type of issue. The general spirit of their understanding was that toolmakers, as a collectivity, would man every machine and job, but that none of them might be forced to move in a particular situation if he objected to this. Before asking a skilled machinist or fitter to move to another work station, a manager had to consult the shop steward. If after consulting the steward a toolmaker refused the request of management, the shop steward got involved in trying to solve the issue through discussion with the worker and work group concerned. Another worker might be interested in the job under contention for a while. But in all cases the unit manager admitted the right of any toolmaker to refuse a move at the end of the procedure.

The primary rationale behind this form of shop-floor control was to prevent management from taking arbitrary action against a particular worker in forcing him to take a job he did not have the ability to hold or simply objected to for any reason. It also gave the shop-floor collective control over the frequency and extent of flexibility of labour required by the toolroom management. Indeed, one of the characteristics of this type of regulation was the central role played by the shop steward. He was fully informed on the whole issue of labour assignment within this large workshop (93 toolmakers in 1979). The steward might be involved both as

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6. Agreement with track loaders, gillers and material handlers in AHT, signed by section manager, 10 May 1978. Source: management files.

a union negotiator and as a mediator between management and any recalcitrant worker. This collective control over the situation also set the strategic conditions for the shop-floor organisation to apply collective sanctions on such an issue, for instance by blacking a job or a machine.

The counterpart, and what made it acceptable to management, was that this procedure generally assured management of a satisfactory degree of internal mobility and little conflict over this matter. Hence there was no restriction on mobility between the sections of the toolroom[7] and no more limitation in terms of scope (such as a 'fitter to fitter' type of rule). The toolroom manager also explicitly stated as an example of co-operation the fact that the shop steward had recently renounced a custom and practice rule that there should be no move of less than one shift duration. The manager explained how the AUEW steward had accepted the point that such a shop rule was unrealistic and counterproductive. Two of the other members of the toolroom committee were not aware of any compromise on this matter at the time of the interview.

Shop-floor workers had developed a high degree of control over assignment in the press shops. While it is not intended to get into all the intricacy of these procedures, it is relevant to show the nature of worker regulation and the different patterns in operation in the two largest sections, i.e. Press shop no. 3 and Press shop no. 4.

An experienced TGWU shop steward recalled the origin of collective control over assignment as a result of a 'struggle which occurred eighteen years ago' about the discretionary power of foremen in distributing the good and the bad jobs.[8] It has to be remembered that, because of the pre-

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7. In the toolroom of the Components Factory, Edwards and Scullion observed that 'the shop was divided into sections comprising lathes, drilling machines, and so on. It was an absolute rule that there was no movement between sections' (1982a:210).

8. Interview with a setters' shop steward, Press shop no. 4, 31 August 1979.

dominance of small and medium batches, it was often necessary to reorganise the production lines and assign labour to new jobs many times during a single shift. In Press shop no. 4, no operator could claim to work on 'his own press', or his own work station. From the list of jobs running, which was presented by the foreman, the shop steward drew the operators' piecework cards, in a system where the first name took the job on top of the list. At the beginning of the shift, the typical arrangement was that one of the two main production lines would run, as well as a few individual presses. The workers whose piecework cards had not been drawn out were placed on waiting time ('on the clock') and paid at 175R (175 per cent performance). They had priority when the next change in production lines occurred during the shift, the determination of the other members making up the working team (and those going on waiting time) depending again on a draw out of the pack of piecework cards. Every time a reorganisation of production and assignment was required during the shift, it followed this basic principle. Moreover, except for the start of the shift, the draw over the composition of the production line often had to be followed by a second draw to establish the respective position (or work station) of everybody on the line.

Over recent years the Light section, which was a small section of the press shops with a high level of worker cohesiveness, had developed shop rules which were similar to those described above. In contrast, the operators of Press shop no. 3 had devised a procedure of assignment of a different kind. First, each operator was allocated to 'his own press', on which he was systematically assigned if it ran at the start of the shift.[9]

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9. The exact procedure by which a worker could get priority on a press was not made clear to the writer. But this certainly appeared to be under shop-floor control. It was pointed out in interviews that older operators tended to prefer the production lines which were operating under the daywork system (especially the lines 3 and 4) as opposed to the piecework payment system.

Consequently, only the operators whose presses were not planned to work took part in a draw. The process was also made more complex by the fact that the operator whose press was not running had priority for job assignment on the line (there were ten of them), and then on the sub-section (of which there were three) within which his press was located. The operators used to have the possibility of going back to their press at any time it was allocated work during a shift. Obviously this practice created problems since they would have to stop production lines going at various times, to enforce the priority right. It was therefore agreed by the operators that the priority rule would apply until the first break of the shift, after which nobody could claim his allocated press or production line. Afterwards the margin of discretion left to the foreman in assigning the 'good' and the 'bad' jobs was limited but nevertheless significant as compared with Press shop no. 4.

In both cases the discretionary power of shop management with regard to labour assignment was further limited by the regular rotation of jobs between operators on the same line. This practice, referred to as 'swopping', was of general application in the press shops. Workers systematically moved on the line every time a given number of components (usually 200 or 300) was produced. Years ago, management resisted this practice, but it was now plainly accepted. It did not break the line or affect production in any way. Besides limiting the discretionary margin of supervision with respect to labour assignment, the practice was advantageous to the operators in many ways. First, it permitted them to share the good and the bad jobs on the line, to diminish boredom and to give some rest when on the easiest jobs (e.g. the job of oiler). Second, it offered the possibility for the work group to 'protect' a workmate who was ill, or had any problem with management, if it was felt fair to do so. Third, it reduced the resources of management with regard to control and

discipline. It did so by making it more problematic to get information on who had done something wrong (e.g. an intended mislocation or any other act of sabotage) and also as regards the following step of applying individual sanction or retaliation.

Interviews with two shop stewards and one foreman in Press shop no. 3 also made clear that another variant of 'swopping' was usual and widely tolerated in this shop. If an operator was assigned, following a draw, to a job he was not willing to do, he could swop with someone on another line who preferred this type of job. This happened, for instance, when an operator who did not mind harsh work and better money got an assignment on an agreed daywork job. It was usually possible to swop since some press operators looked for the 'stability' of agreed daywork. As long as production was done properly, the foremen did not bother about this type of arrangement between the workers. Although this practice was less important than the systematic job rotation on the production lines, it nevertheless increased the range of choice of operators and confined the foreman's discretion to a certain extent. It is appropriate to put some emphasis on the impact of the whole process of job rotation between workers on the development of labour cohesiveness and the erosion of management control. The main consequence is that relations with management on important issues such as standard quantity, manning levels and work allocation developed more and more at the collective level of the work group or the section, as opposed to an individual type of relationship between an operator and his supervisor.

Some of the causes for this high degree of shop-floor control over assignment of labour in the press shops may be found by looking at the work process. The method of production, which was mainly batches of small and medium size, was one of the reasons why the composition of the working

teams had to be changed many times during a single shift. The high degree of flexibility in labour assignment which was required precluded a permanent division of labour within the ranks of the press operators of one section. This effect was reinforced by the use of a type of machinery which needed little specialisation on the part of the operator. In other words, the fact that the period of training necessary for moving from one press to the other was minimal (and non-existent after a while) created the conditions for interchangeability. These objective conditions were very much reinforced by the high degree of integration between the work stations in Press shops nos. 3 and 4, a factor which definitely had a positive effect on labour cohesiveness. It has to be emphasised that it is the combination of these characteristics of the work process which may have an impact on control over the issue under discussion here. The writer does not seek to argue that these structural factors may constitute a full explanation of worker control over assignment. The argument is, however, that this particular work process set the necessary conditions for such a process to develop in a context where the shop-floor organisation was strong enough to resist management at shop level.

It would not be possible, either, to explain satisfactorily the differences in regulation between the two press shops by referring exclusively to structural variables. Nevertheless, part of the explanation for the higher degree of cohesiveness and collective control in Press shop no. 4 lies in the fact that it was a more integrated unit as compared with the ten production lines of the large Press shop no. 3.[10] Evans, a former press operator in the Light section, also observed that 'the more compact lay-out of the presses in no. 4 and the predominance of working "in-line"

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10. The Unit manager for Press shop no. 3 pointed out that there were at least twenty items (product specifications) being worked on in this section at any one time. Interview, 7 May 1980.

or groups made it easier for the workers themselves to observe each other more closely, and so exercise discipline more collectively' (1980:65). A major consequence of the difference in the patterns of job control over assignment in Press shops nos. 3 and 4 is the fact that they adopted a more collective stance with respect to bargaining over standard quantities and manning in the latter case. The priority rule in operation in Press shop no. 3 also meant in practice that operators made deals with the work study men which concerned 'their' press or line, without involving other operators who may occasionally have to work on this basis. Evans describes this situation:

> Those working more regularly on a press, or group or line of presses would be more likely to negotiate prices acceptable to themselves; those who came onto these jobs only irregularly would be inclined to compare the new requirements of 'making the job pay' with those they were familiar with, and would possibly be critical of the job standards. In nos 1 and 3 shops, then, the work group tended to centre round the 'line' or 'press grouping' rather than the whole shop as in no 4. (1980:66)

It should now be clear that press operators had developed a relatively high degree of labour autonomy. It also has to be stressed that most of these shop rules over assignment were the result of unilateral worker regulation. Decisions were taken at section meetings, where the shop steward had no more than a leadership role, the majority rule being decisive.[11] The shop steward informed the section manager of the shop-floor decision. There was certainly room for discussion, although local management did not really have a veto on these matters. In short, management resistance would have created bad feelings and problems. A Press shop no. 3 shop steward confidently told this researcher: 'I can't remember of a time

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11. Such a meeting comprised the press operators on the same shift in one section. Most shop rules applied to both shifts of the same section, which were rotating on a four-week basis. Most dealings with management were conducted on day shift and one of the means of communication between the shifts was the shop stewards' book.

they objected to a rule we made'.[12]

Indeed, management tolerance of this type of regulation certainly contributed to its development. Production managers found some advantages which compensated to some extent for the loss of discretion and authority. In a formal interview, the section manager for Press shop no. 3 put forward the two main ones.[13] First, rules for job assignment were needed anyway and the clearer they were, the better the chances that it worked properly and quickly at the beginning of and during the shift. Hence his comment that 'as long as work is done properly, I don't bother'. The belief which underlay this position was that assignment of labour was not in itself conflictual. And it is true that, at the beginning of the shift, the preoccupation on both sides was to find some work for everybody so that they could reach their standard and 'get in front'.

The second advantage from the local management point of view was that the application of the rule became very much the responsibility of the shop-floor. Collective discipline meant that everybody had to submit to the majority rule. The role of the shop steward was crucial in this respect. Interestingly, it was mainly in Press shop no. 4, where job control over assignment was found to be greater, that problems of collective discipline were encountered. On at least two occasions in 1978 and 1979, resistance from dissident workers forced the intervention of the TGWU convenor. The following extracts from the TGWU shop stewards' committee Minutes Book are sufficiently significant to be quoted at length.

> Convenor was called to no 4 shop about an incident when one operator was complaining about the working method on the line. He refused to work in the same way as the rest of the men had traditionally done. They, in turn, voted to

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12. Informal interview, 11 October 1979.

13. Interview held on 4 October 1979.

> refuse to work with him. The [dissident] agreed to return to work on the majority's terms, but requested a meeting about the working practice.[14]
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> Problem in no 4 press shop where 5 operators on day-shift opposed the practice of moving around the presses. A majority of the section voted to continue this practice and refuse to work with the 5 if they persisted. The 5 operators argued they were not breaking any agreement with the Company. Convenor had reluctantly become involved. He contacted the district official who advised him that if the union couldn't insist on how the men work the system, leave it to the company to insist. Convenor felt the company would prefer the men not to move around. He advised the 5 to move, for their own interest because they could find they end up on a bad job as easily as a good job. But he had to advise the majority that the 5 men were not breaking any agreement, so he could not instruct them to move round if they are unwilling. If they refused to work with them, they technically would be at fault. Bro [shop steward] reported that [unit manager] had agreed to meet himself, and one operator from each side in the morning.[15]

The above quotations raise many interesting questions relating to work-shop politics. The observation under consideration here is that the higher degree of collective control over labour assignment also commands a higher degree of collective discipline. As a corollary, it brings some relief to supervision and junior management who do not even have to get involved in this type of conflict within the ranks of labour. Moreover, the greater involvement of the shop-floor and their shop steward in labour management is not in itself detrimental to production, a point developed by Edwards and Scullion, especially with reference to the Small Metals Factory (1982a: 202-5, 211-14). What is more problematic, however, is the real impact of worker control over assignment on management control in general. Job control over assignment may have an instrumental effect, in the sense that it may set the basis for shop-floor control over other aspects of the work process.

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14. Minutes of the meeting held on 25 January 1978.

15. Minutes of the meeting held on 15 March 1979. In the minutes of the stewards' meeting held a week later, one reads on this issue: 'Convenor had attended meeting with [unit manager] who wanted the men to stay on the presses as allocated at the start of the job. No further news.' (21 March 1979).

It has been stressed earlier in the dissertation that, in Firm A, the section did not represent a geographical area of real significance with respect to labour relations. Hence the realities of assignment of labour within a working area and of temporary transfer of labour between these were not clearly dissociated. In such a case, these aspects are encompassed in the whole issue of flexibility of labour, as opposed to the different issue of mobility of labour on a permanent basis, which is discussed in a later sub-section. It is therefore appropriate to continue with the evidence on job control over transfer of labour between sections at Firm B, and then compare this with the situation observed in the other case study.

2.2 Transfer of Labour

The issue of mobility had been one of the most serious matters of contention for many years in Firm B. The problem arose particularly in connection with the large group of semi-skilled production workers who were on daywork, and also with reference to the press operators. From a formal viewpoint, the 1975 collective agreement appeared to leave considerable flexibility to management. However, it has to be looked at in its entirety. Here are the most relevant paragraphs:

> It is essential that the Company is able to respond to changes in the work mix within the Factory and capable of re-allocating resources in response to short term overloads or bottlenecks. Within reasonable constraints management must have the facility to manage.
>
> Management requires that personnel are mobile between various roles within their own Unit, consistent with the individuals being capable (both physically and mentally) to discharge the tasks involved. Where necessary, training will be initiated to make the mobility possible . . .
>
> Any issue arising in the operation of this policy would be dealt with within the existing procedure agreement.[16]

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16. Agreement entitled 'Hourly rated wage increases applicable from April 1975', Appendix II, section 2.

The last paragraph actually meant that mobility was subject to the procedure agreement of July 1972 which incorporated a status quo clause. In practice, whenever shop-floor workers wished to resist a managerial proposal to transfer labour from one section to another, they insisted on the issue being put through procedure. In practice, this gave a veto power to the shop-floor. Evans reported that this particular situation

> was identified by management as the most serious obstacle to their developing a more flexible response to customer demand. Because of the nature of production and work schedules, by the time negotiations had been held and temporary transfers arranged, very often the demand for more labour in a particular department had dropped. It was a disincentive to managers matching their manning levels to production requirements, and consequently, a contributory factor to what managers called 'unrealistic' levels of manpower.
>
> . . . Even in times of redundancy and short-time working, many used this clause as a delay tactic in expectancy of an improvement in the work load. While a degree of temporary transfers did take place, in the flat-rate areas during such periods there were no cases of agreement to transfer at short notice without the coercive support of short-time working. (1980:93-4)

This observation summarises well the respective control achieved by both sides over this specific issue. Transferring labour between sections was not impossible. However, voluntary acceptance of it was likely to be difficult for management to achieve without the pressure of the labour market, i.e. a concrete threat of a shorter working week or redundancies. The pressure of the product market only, in terms of specific production requirements, was not so decisive an argument.

In formal interviews, shop stewards from various departments spontaneously pointed out that management had to get the agreement of both sections concerned before implementing a temporary transfer. Obviously, the agreement of the section the worker came from depended very much on immediate employment prospects in this particular area. Hence the threat of imminent lay-offs or short-time working might outweigh any reluctance to accept a reduction of the manning of the section and to cover for the

job of the worker being transferred.

The situation was less straightforward on the part of the receiving section, which typically insisted upon some guarantees before accepting labour on a temporary basis. To start with, workers in this section would usually require the assurance of a forty-hour week. Since much of the reluctance to accept temporary labour was due to the possible loss of overtime earnings (Evans, 1980:47), the shop steward might also bargain over the maintenance of a given overtime level. The following memo signed by a section manager in the AHT unit provides a telling example of such bargaining occurring:

> It has been agreed between myself and no 2 Fitting and Welding Shop Committee that 2 men from S.D.I. Dept. will be allowed to work on the above section on a temporary basis, if the present levels of over-time are maintained, and if at any time the over-time levels are reduced then the additional labour will be taken off the section.
> Please note that I am not, as Section Manager, giving a guarantee on future over-time levels.[17]

In interview, the TGWU shop steward and the other three members of the shop committee in the Dravo section (of the Heating Division), which had the reputation of adopting restrictive policies on such matters, explained the rationale of their action.[18] They clearly saw themselves as representing an autonomous unit within the factory. Since their primary responsibility was to protect wages and conditions within their section, they would only accept temporary labour in order to save the jobs of other union members in accordance with a policy 'accepted within the union movement', on the understanding that they could expect the same protection if their jobs were temporarily at stake. The position adopted by this

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17. Memo from the section manager for the attention of the general manager, the industrial relations manager, and the shop stewards concerned. Entitled 'Additional Temporary Labour no 2 Fitting and Welding', and dated 25 October 1977.

18. Interview held on 30 August 1979.

section in a case which occurred earlier in 1979 is indicative of this defensive attitude. At the weekly meeting of the TGWU shop stewards, their representative 'reported a decision of his section that they would allow 3 people into the shop on agreement that after 13 weeks, 3 Dravo would get voluntary redundancy. Convenor answered that he had been told by the Company that he should go to the Dravo and sort them out.'[19] The minutes of the meeting held the following week show that they finally accepted the three workers coming on a temporary basis 'after reaching an understanding with manager that current overtime arrangements would continue for 5 weeks and then be reviewed'.[20]

While the evidence presented above deals with production workers in daywork areas, the situation which prevailed in the press shops also deserves some attention. There again, management had a formal right to mobility of labour between the sections of the press shops. The 'Press shop incentive scheme agreement' stipulated that 'it is agreed that there can be free movement of labour from one press shop or area to another. Any "movement" thought necessary by management will be fully discussed with the stewards of the areas concerned.'[21] In practice, however, production managers admitted that they had lost the freedom to do so. There was no longer free movement of labour between Press shops nos. 3 and 4. In the words of a shop steward now working in a daywork area, 'there is no bridge between shops 3 and 4'.[22] It emerges from the interviews that the main reasons for this shop-floor policy had to do with piecework.

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19. TGWU shop stewards' committee Minutes book, 28 February 1979.
20. ibid., meeting held on 7 March 1979.
21. Article 3.7 of the document dated 27 January 1972. This agreement still provided the general framework of the piecework scheme at the time of the fieldwork.
22. Informal interview with TGWU steward of the 'Panel section', 7 September 1979.

Movements between sections were held to affect sectional cohesiveness with respect to the negotiation of standards and, moreover, press operators used to lose money as a result of a transfer because of the learning process. In the Press shop incentive scheme there was no reference to any allowance for an operator being transferred to a new job. (In the other firm, the 1975 agreement provided a 10 per cent allowance for the first 40 hours on a new job; Section 10, art. 2b.) In a written agreement reached in April 1972 on the reorganisation of the former Press shop no. 1 into the Light section, management accepted that the press operators going to this Light section would not be mobile across on to other no. 3 presses.[23] This was so even though these sections were adjacent within the large shop no. 3, the operators doing similar work under the same piecework scheme.

When the shop stewards put forward a claim for a lay-off pay agreement in 1978, management made it clear that any progress would have to be tied to a union compromise on mobility. Hence when the personnel director issued a draft proposal on lay-off pay late in August 1978, the general reaction of the TGWU shop stewards was that it was 'no more than a mobility agreement'.[24] At a later stage, when the Company submitted its proposals for the funding of part of the 1979 wage increase by productivity improvements, mobility again became a central issue. The following extract gives a good idea of the spirit and content of management's proposals.

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23. Copy of the agreement on the reorganisation of the 'Light section no 3 'ress shop', dated 12 April 1972. Source: management files.

24. TGWU shop stewards' committee Minutes book, 6 September 1978. There are regular references to this issue in the Minutes book over the years 1978 and 1979.

> If the Company is to meet market requirements and fluctuations it needs to be able to transfer resources (including the human resource, namely its employees) within and between its constituent product Divisions . . .
>
> As a consequence, it will be at management's discretion to move employees from one section, Division, etc. to another . . .
>
> . . . The overall design of this arrangement is that people can be transferred easily from one location to another where the business position requires it (i.e. where the need for manpower is increased in a particular area on a temporary basis).[25]

Many specific conditions under which management could proceed with temporary transfers were part of the proposals. For instance, movements would have been limited to six categories of flat rate employees and four groups of pieceworkers, one of them the press operators. Most important of all was the repeal of the 1975 agreement presented above and the implication that mobility would no longer be subject to <u>status quo</u>. It is interesting to note that the controversial industrial relations plan put forward by British Leyland management in 1979, and ultimately imposed on its workforce, also included a drastic change on mobility. Hence clause 5.2 (in a section on changes in 'working practices') stipulated:

> It is agreed that there will be full co-operation in the movement of labour to ensure the efficient continuity of production. In consequence, any Employee may be called upon to work in any part of his employing plant and/or to carry out any grade or category of work within the limits of his abilities and experience, with training if necessary.[26]

A good number of employees and shop stewards shared management's view that greater flexibility of labour was necessary to improve productivity

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25. Third issue of the Company's proposals on the Hourly rated wage settlement for 1979. Issued by the personnel director on 6 April 1979, clause 2.4.1.

26. <u>Company Proposed Draft Agreement on Bargaining, Pay, Employee Benefits and Productivity, Covering Hourly Rated Employees in BL Cars</u>, November 1979, p. 2.

and the financial position of Firm B. The possibility of a deal involving a lay-off pay guarantee also had to be seriously considered on the union side. The TGWU convenor was certainly inclined to think that the shop-floor line of action on mobility was too restrictive (Evans, 1980:94). The following entry illustrates the type of compromise he was promoting:

> He [the convenor] repeated the advice of the union district official that policy was to, whenever possible, avoid lay-offs and accept mobility. Convenor felt we could try to pin the Company down to having mobility only on a day where lay-off would otherwise be operated. He suggested that it might be tried for 6 months to look at some of the problems in practice.[27]

The Company proposals for change were finally rejected, the principal resistance coming from the production workers (and especially those in the large PO 3 classification) and the press operators, most of them TGWU members. According to Evans' account, 'the company's offer was endorsed by the large majority of stewards, but rejected by an equally large majority of the membership' (1980:107). In a memo for the attention of the JSSC members, the personnel director recognised that the Company had to withdraw its proposal and expressed the implications of this in a style which shows some resentment. He emphasised that

> the principles behind the 1975 agreement on mobility naturally continue to stand, and the Company will in future press its case where it believes that to be necessary.
>
> Mobility is required to enable the Company to more effectively discharge its order book: the deletion of claus 2.4.1 is likely to depress profitability and therefore result in less money in the pot for 1980's settlement.
>
> There will be no domestic lay off agreement unless a mobility clause better (from the Company's point of view) than 2.4.1 can be successfully negotiated.[28]

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27. TGWU shop stewards' committee Minutes book, 17 January 1979.

28. Quoted from a memorandum written by the personnel director, dated 26 April 1979. Source: management files.

Management failure to get this agreement is indicative of shop-floor resistance to compromise on measures of control which had developed informally over the years. As Evans pointed out, 'the issue of mobility is one that the members felt could only be controlled through their customary informal checks, with the now additional support of the mutuality clause' (1980:107-8). The convenor also pointed out that the more management insisted on their proposal, the more a feeling of suspicion was spreading on the shop-floor; they felt there was 'something behind it'.[29]

Such a sophisticated set of rules over assignment and temporary movement of labour was unknown in the two factories of Firm A. To some extent this may be explained by the fact that the section did not represent an important point of reference, or a barrier to the free movement of labour. This single factor certainly made flexibility of labour a different issue.

To make this observation is not to say that management had complete freedom, or that workers had no influence, on temporary movements of labour. The first point is that labour mobility was relatively limited in the large machine shops of Factory II. The period of training necessary to achieve a better than average standard of production was longer than in the press shops of the other firm. Operators and machinists tended to become specialised on 'their' machines and they commonly stayed on the same work station for years. In such a case, they liked to point out that 'they know their job better than anybody else'. When asked about the issues over which they had some control, many of them spontaneously answered 'the control of my job'. This degree of specialisation and the relative 'permanence' on the same work station had the effect of fostering a type of

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29. Formal interview with TGWU convenor, 25 October 1979.

fostering a type of individual autonomy on the worker side, and particularly a high degree of independence in relation to supervision. Such an acquaintance with a particular job also imposed limitations on management freedom over deployment of labour. Writing on the basis of research conducted in three Manchester factories, Goodman (1982:378) also observed that the concept of 'property rights in jobs'

> clearly had deep meaning for most workers, and was the basis of often intricate agreements concerning temporary transfers . . . tenacious claims to highly specific tasks can obviously reduce flexibility. Arbitrary transfers were successfully resisted in all three factories, in which the main criterion (apart from new starters) was equality of inconvenience and 'fair shares'.

It has to be stressed that the contrast between the machine shops (Firm A) and the press shops (Firm B) related not only to the type of shop regulations and the process by which decisions were taken but also to the frequency of changes in labour assignment. While there was constant movement on the shop-floor in the press shops, there was relative stability in labour assignments in the three machine shops. In order to go some way towards explaining this significant difference, it is interesting to look at the main characteristics of the work processes, using the analytical tools introduced in this chapter. The first element is that the non-automatic and semi-automatic machines in operation in the machine shops required some training and specialisation on the part of the operators and machinists. They were conventional machine shops oriented towards very specific and specialised production. Although there was no 'modern' or 'high' technology, many of the machines were nevertheless of some ingenuity and sophistication in terms of engineering. Since many work stations consisted of the grouping of two or more machines, most operators and machinists liked to stay on a job which they had got to know well over the years. They knew all the 'angles' of the job, for

different components, and this relieved some of the pressure of 'making out' (Burawoy, 1979).

Another relevant variable introduced at the beginning of this chapter is the decomposition of labour. The comparison is clear in this respect: there was a lower degree of decomposition in the machine shops as compared with the press shops. It will be shown at a later stage in the dissertation (particularly in Chapter 7) that demarcations were rigid between the different functions in the press shops. In contrast, the machinists did the setting of their machines and were usually quite independent in this respect. (As noted in Chapter 2, the basis of the distinction between the classification of machinist and operator was that the former had to do the setting work.) This lower degree of division of labour also contributed to the development of the labour autonomy and 'control over the job' referred to above. Indeed, the job of machinist required not only specialisation (mentioned above) but also a considerable degree of qualification.

A third general characteristic of the work process which also contributed to the much lower frequency of changes in labour assignment in the machine shops was the method of production. Although batch production predominated in the machine shops, these batches were of a larger size than in the press shops. There was even mass production on some lines in the machine shops. Another aspect is that although there was a fairly wide range of products in these machine shops, these product specifications were grouped in a more limited number of categories of products. Hence a change of batch did not always lead to a modification in the manning and assignment of labour, in contrast to the situation observed in Press shop no. 3 and Press shop no. 4.

When there was effectively a need for temporary transfers between

work stations, the management of Firm A had a relatively high rate of success in putting forward the argument of fluctuations in product requirements. In some cases, and especially when there was little or no work coming in on a particular work station, the alternative for a worker or work group who resisted transfer was lay-off. The production managers we talked to were rather sensitive on the point that priorities in production had to be a management prerogative. One of the concrete implications of this principle was that even if there was still some work going on on a worker's usual work station, he might be asked to move for a while to cover for a job which was urgently needed. According to the personnel director and the industrial relations officer, management regularly succeeded in getting this degree of co-operation, although it usually involved discussion with the shop steward.[30] One of the arguments put forward by management in this type of situation was a reference to the 'flexibility agreement'. From all acounts, this 'agreement' had never been written down. It was an understanding which held some recognition on the part of the shop stewards. The industrial relations officer, a former GMWU shop steward, recollected that this originated from 1975. In the context of the loss of a major contract with Volvo, the unions then had to accept greater flexibility of labour to avoid lay-offs in substantial numbers.[31]

In this firm, any resistance to movements of labour which were felt to be unjustified could only be manifested on an individual or work group basis. In the foundry and the machine shops, the issues of assignment and flexibility of labour were therefore within the scope of management

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30. Informal interview, 3 January 1979.

31. Formal interview, 18 December 1978.

decision-making, in contrast to the situation prevailing in the other firm. It has to be stressed, however, that in order to protect this prerogative and its legitimacy on the shop-floor, managers took care to use this option reasonably and fairly. This was particularly important in this type of issue where efficiency depended very much on shop-floor co-operation.

Management rights in these matters had also been institutionalised by the inclusion into the comprehensive 1978 collective agreement of provisions specific to flexibility of labour. It was 'agreed that there will be no restriction on the management use of labour' provided that particular criteria were respected.[32] This was followed by usual provisions such as the following: 'when transferred the employee retains his own rate or the job rate he goes onto if it is higher'. The agreement did not actually recognise the shop steward's right to be consulted before any transfer of labour but retained the milder formula which said that 'at all times, the Unions will be kept fully informed of movements of labour'. It also prevented reference to the status quo clause by stipulating that 'in the event of a dispute the employee will move while representations are made through procedure, provided that the move is consistent with the above criteria'.

In this section of the 1978 collective agreement, the parties confirmed their commitment to flexibility and productivity. To this effect, there is a direct reference to the national agreement of December 1968 on 'Productivity Principles and Bargaining Criteria' between the EEF and the CSEU. These are the most relevant clauses of this national agreement:

1. The Union and the Federation unreservedly agree that there is an urgent and continuing necessity, in the

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32. Agreement between the employer and the GMWU, TGWU, AUEW and EETPU, effective on 1 January 1978, section nine, pp. 15-17.

interests of those employed in the Engineering Industry and of the Community as a whole, for the productive resources and the manpower of the industry to be deployed and used more efficiently . . .

4. The following are some examples of impediments to the efficient utilisation of labour:

(i) inappropriate and uneconomic manning of machines, processes, production lines or departments;
(ii) inappropriate and uneconomic use of labour;
(iii) lack of flexibility in the deployment of labour;
(iv) resistance in principle to the introduction of shift-working on the basis of nationally agreed conditions;
(v) resistance to the planned use of working hours;
(vi) waiting time and other non-productive time.[33]

Indeed, over the years 1978 to 1980, the issues of flexibility of labour and productivity became more and more predominant in management objectives. The negotiations leading to the 1980 collective agreement were centred on the theme of productivity. In the minutes of these bargaining sessions held in late November 1979, the managerial argument is presented in the following terms:

> The aim of the Company is to agree on maximum machine utilisation at these pay talks in line with the National Agreements. The night shift is to be closed because it is uneconomic at the moment, if this situation is changed then the night shift may not be closed . . .
>
> The Company require all current operating practices to be maintained as a minimum, as well as flexibility and mobility and the abolition of hand washing and machine cleaning allowances. A commitment on increased productivity is essential from the trade unions.[34]

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33. Agreement of 10 December 1968, article 8.2 of the Handbook of National Agreements. Clause 4 was quoted in full in the domestic collective agreement. It may be recalled that Firm A was not federated. It was generally accepted on both sides, however, that the Company was bound by the terms of the national agreements. During the fieldwork, we came across an exception to this understanding when the Company refused to enforce the terms of the national agreement of April 1978 on the particular aspect of holiday pay. This dispute went up through Works Conference, which was attended by the researcher in December 1978, where failure to agree was registered.

34. Minutes of '1980 Pay Negotiations', meeting held outside the Company premises and involving the personnel director, the finance director and two other managers as well as all the firm's shop stewards, 27 November 1979, pp. 16-17.

The Company did not have much difficulty in getting such a 'commitment on increased productivity'. An agreement was reached early in January 1980, after a limited number of days of negotiation as compared with the two preceding years. In fact, during the second half of 1979, the shop stewards and shop-floor workers in general offered very little resistance to a restructuring of production in the machine shops. As mentioned in Chapter 2, this involved a significant reduction in the labour force through voluntary redundancies and attrition. The GMWU senior shop steward was firmly convinced that managers were only responding to market pressures and that the origin of the problem was 'beyond management control'. His endorsement of the resolute changes implemented by the Company helped to secure shop-floor co-operation. In an interview the convenor stressed that he had had problems with some of the less experienced shop stewards in making them understand the need for changes in working methods and higher productivity. By December 1979, however, his position within the shop steward organisation had been strengthened by the fact that three of the four stewards who had accepted voluntary redundancy were among the less co-operative with the dominant shop steward line as well as with management.[35] It may be recalled that by then the recession was very severe, particularly in the West Midlands engineering sector.

2.3 Internal Progression Hierarchy

This third category of substantive issues concerns the movements of labour which are of a more permanent nature. More precisely, it addresses

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35. Formal interview with senior shop steward, 14 December 1979. In total, six of the sixteen shop stewards in function in March 1979 had given up by December of the same year; two of them were still working for the Company. It may be of some interest to note that, in both firms, experienced managers admitted that they had some degree of success in inciting (by various means) 'trouble-makers' or more militant stewards to take voluntary redundancy.

the following question: to what extent, and by which process, is it possible for workers to have access to better jobs within the ranks of manual labour, once they have been employed in the factory? What is their degree of control over the access to jobs which are commonly felt to be higher on the promotion ladder?

In the United States and Canada, this is of course an important area of job control, the whole procedure being generally tied up with the notion of seniority. Indeed, the seniority rule is a founding principle of the type of job control developed by non-craft unions in these countries. Over recent years the broader concept of the internal labour market, which refers to the development of a complex set of rules concerning the attachment of the worker to the firm and the whole question of deployment of labour within the factory, has been established by writers in the North American context (see, for instance, Doeringer and Piore, 1971; Edwards, 1975; and Burawoy, 1979).

From the viewpoint of a North American student, it is therefore interesting to observe the relative importance of the seniority principle in a context where job control is generally felt to be stronger than in our native country. From such a perspective, and reporting on his study of the engineering industry in the Birmingham area, Milton Derber (1955:64) wrote:

> The seniority idea (referred to as 'last one in, first one out' principle) does not have the widespread appeal in Britain that it does to American unions, and by and large the unions there have not made it an important objective. As a result, management had a considerable amount of flexibility in most establishments with respect to lay-offs as well as to rehiring and transfers. The concept of the worker's 'right to a specific job' was not prominent except where craft regulations were affected. On promotions there were even fewer restrictions.

Seymour Melman, also an American scholar, conducted some fieldwork at the Standard Motor Company in Coventry in the early fifties. He noted the

comparatively limited influence of seniority. He observed, however, that following the lessening in influence of the craft tradition, 'for the first time there have appeared the rudiments of seniority regulation covering the movement of workers among occupations' (1958:55).

In the current period, the impact of the seniority principle in British workplaces is by no means comparable to North America. But it is nevertheless the case that with the exception of craftsmen's jobs, many of the better manual jobs in British factories, especially in terms of skill and job content, are available only through the internal promotion channels. In this process seniority may have a significant influence. This was shown in important research on a local labour market for manual workers in the East Midlands (Blackburn and Mann, 1979:95-9, 110).[36] The following sums up their findings on the internal labour market:

> In general, then, better jobs are gained through movement up the internal hierarchy, presenting a further limitation on choice . . . With the exception of autonomy, differences in intrinsic job content - variety, manual skill and mental abilities - tend to lie within the internal labour market. Relatively skilful jobs are not readily available, even in return for sacrifices in other work aspects. Skilful jobs are obtained with seniority and are therefore accompanied by higher wages. (1979:99)

A recent paper by William Brown on the impact of the recession upon work-place labour relations indicates that this trend may be growing in Britain. He puts the emphasis on the development of 'a set of management strategies which tend to isolate workforces from both the labour market and the labour movement outside' (1983:48). By these strategies British employers may foster the development of internal labour markets and a form of 'enterprise unionism'. In this context, it is interesting to look in more

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36. The research covered nine firms located in the town of Peterborough, including two large engineering firms.

detail at the regulations on internal promotion in the two firms under study.

To start with, it is important to note that these movements of labour of a relatively 'permanent' nature did not have exactly the same meaning in both firms. In contrast with the other firm, the assignment of labour in Firm A was not determined within a section but was controlled at factory level. Also, a worker was assigned to a very specific job. In Firm B the worker was assigned to a section where his labour power would be used according to his job grade. In practice this meant that a worker in Firm A had to go through the internal vacancy procedure to obtain a better job in his own department, while it was usually possible for a worker in Firm B to improve his position if there was a vacancy to be filled in his section.[37] These differences certainly help to explain why this question of internal promotion was more an issue of contention in Firm A, particularly in the machine shops.

At an 'extraordinary Works Council' held specifically to discuss this matter in August 1976, the Firm A management adopted a very traditional stance. It is reported in the minutes of the meeting that

> the Transport and General Workers Union were claiming that one of their members was being unfairly treated and consistently passed over for promotion. The Company replied that with reference to the 1929 agreement, the company had the right to manage, and this must also include the right to higher and fire, although the right to fire has been modified somewhat by domestic agreement and legislation. The company insisted that it was fundamental to the right of management to reserve its right of highering.
>
> The Transport and General replying mentioned that service should not be the sole criterion, but said that its member Mr. Z., clock number 3069 has been unfairly

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37. Of course, this was irrelevant in some sections where labour assignment was done on a purely collective basis, as in Press shop no. 4, for instance.

> treated and turned down on two occasions, for piece end grinding jobs.
>
> . . . Mr. /personnel director/ then mentioned that it was the company who had the right to higher and select and not the trade unions.[38]

Although such a strict managerial rights position was more of an argument than a reflection of the true balance of power in the workplace, it shows the importance given by management to the issue of selection of workers for the filling of vacancies and promotion. This matter certainly had important ramifications for management control.

For many years decisions on this matter had been taken according to a formal management policy which stressed management's ultimate right to decide. Although this was by no means an agreement, the shop stewards had been active in challenging management over the application of this policy. There is evidence of this in the minutes of various works council meetings:

> The Trade Unions request that any vacancies arising be advertised in the usual way. The Company have agreed to this.[39]
>
> The company is reserving its rights under the National Agreements re. hiring and transfers. The guidelines in operation at the moment are a statement from the company and are not an agreement.
>
> The criteria are suitability, service, ability to do the job, and the applicants' history within the company. The final decision is by the company.
>
> The AUEW feel that their members are being discriminated against and are prepared to go to law for an interpretation of the 1968 Act.[40]

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38. Minutes of a meeting involving shop stewards' representatives of all manual unions, held on 13 August 1976. It has to be noted that all the minutes of works council meetings to which reference is made in the dissertation were written by a management representative and should not be regarded as 'agreed minutes'.
39. Minutes of the meeting held on 12 November 1975.
40. Minutes of the meeting held on 16 February 1977.

In 1976, the Company indicated its wish to issue a revised policy statement on internal vacancies and there was much discussion with the shop stewards on this matter. In fact, the major preoccupation of management was to make sure that seniority was considered neither the sole criterion nor the most predominant one. This was the meaning of the following entry: 'amendments to the internal recruitment policy are to be issued. More emphasis will be placed on experience and suitability as opposed to length of service.'[41] The new 'Internal Recruitment Policy' issued by the personnel director in June 1977 set out the following regulations:

> In dealing with applications the company will exclude applicants who
>
> (a) Have been with the company less than twelve months.
> (b) Have been in the company's employ for longer but have not been in their current occupation for more than twelve months.
> (c) Applicants who having previously applied for an internal vacancy, was offered it and refused it within the previous year.
>
> Other applicants will be selected on the following criteria:
>
> (a) Previous experience for the job applied for.
> (b) Works history, i.e. absenteeism etc.
> (c) Ability to communicate where appropriate for safety or operational reasons.
> (d) Service with the company.

It will be noted that, once the minimum period of twelve months of employment was met, seniority was only the fourth criterion for internal promotion. While the second criterion ('works history') might refer to the co-operative spirit of the worker, the third one ('ability to communicate') might hinder the progress of many immigrant workers in the foundry who had a limited understanding of English. In practice, however, it was only through many years of good service that workers gained access to the better jobs, especially within the large group of machinists. It is

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41. Minutes of the works council meeting held on 10 November 1976; similar entry in the minutes of the meeting held on 15 July 1976.

also worth recalling that there was virtually no movement of labour between the factories. Until recently vacancies in one plant were not even advertised in the other.

As part of this new policy, management also sought to establish its right to go for external recruitment for jobs arising out of a first movement of personnel (i.e. from the second stage of internal mobility). This was challenged by the unions and an agreement was reached at full-time official level by which management was required to advertise (on the noticeboard) in three consecutive stages before going to the external market. If a vacancy had to be filled, for any reason, the personnel officer had to advertise this job X, the job of the worker Y who would get the job X, as well as a third job which might be left vacant if someone was 'promoted' to the job Y. The book in which the personnel officer registered carefully the successive stages of the procedure showed that for many jobs in the machine shops there were effectively three internal movements before the lower grade vacancy was filled through the external labour market. It was observed that the shop stewards were vigilant in checking management interpretation of the rules all through the process. Here are examples of the types of dispute which were reported under the heading 'Internal Recruitment Policy':

> Another Works Conference is to be called on Internal Recruitment, because of the Transport and General Workers Union objection to an outside operator being on 711F Grind.[42]

> The Shop Stewards registered a failure to agree on the basis if one man applies for the job with insufficient service provided and he is satisfactory he should be transferred. They did not want to pursue the argument that a man should have no more than one move in twelve months.

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42. Minutes of the works council meeting held on 16 June 1977 (meeting no. 21).

The Company indicated they were not prepared to accept this position, and the Trade Unions are therefore registering a failure to agree.

On a separate issue K. [TGWU shop steward] indicated that with a vacancy on Rockwell on nights, if we brought a man in from outside to do the job, the job would be 'blacked'. The basis for this position was that there had only been one applicant and he had only a few days short of twelve months service.[43]

The situation was different at Firm B. The information on vacancies was not communicated on the noticeboards but through the shop steward network. The senior shop stewards got the information from management and informed their shop stewards at the weekly meeting. On return to the shop-floor the stewards informed their constituency members. The applicants were then interviewed by a production manager (usually the unit manager) who had the responsibility to choose the worker 'best suited for the job'. This procedure applied to two successive stages, as opposed to three in the other case study, after which the Company went to the external labour market. In formal interviews with representatives of both sides it was made clear that the production manager had the freedom to decide at his discretion, without being constrained by the seniority rule. Over the years this had not been a matter of conflict between management and labour. The shop stewards had not really challenged management on this. Clearly, seniority on promotion did not seem to be a priority for this workplace union organisation. This might only be possible, however, if management appears to decide, as a general rule, within the limits of fairness. As the personnel director commented, 'like in anything there is the formal and the informal system and in practice we generally must have good reasons for not respecting seniority'.[44] In

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43. Minutes of the works council meeting held on 9 November 1978 (meeting no. 34).

44. Formal interview, 2 May 1980.

fact, if a worker with higher seniority was not chosen, and especially if it was not the first time that he was passed over, he or his shop steward might raise the matter and complain about it. Some evidence of this occurring was found in the TGWU shop stewards' committee Minutes book. However, the point is that this was not an issue which was felt to be important enough for the shop-floor to put pressure on and apply sanctions.

Another relevant consideration was that although management decided in the last resort, the experienced TGWU convenor was sufficiently involved in the whole process of labour mobility and internal promotion to exert real influence. And since the toolroom (AUEW) and the tinsmith areas (NUSMW) were isolated from these internal movements of labour, in the sense that a worker could only have access to these sections through the external labour market (conditioned by a pre-entry closed shop), it was mostly within the ranks of the TGWU that such movements occurred. From the start their convenor was informed of all job vacancies. As was the case with most issues in which the TGWU was involved within the factory, he was also likely to be informed and involved whenever a case was not restricted, by its implications, to an individual or a particular section but had some ramifications for the collective organisation. Here is an illustration of the autonomy left to the convenor in such matters:

> Convenor spoke of new starters who seem to think that they can swop jobs after a short period as press-operators, and felt that they are being misinformed. Stewards discussed problem and left it to Convenor to treat such case on its merits on questions of transfers.[45]

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45. TGWU shop stewards' committee Minutes book, meeting held on 8 December 1976. Similar evidence in the minutes of the meeting held on 9 March 1977.

Taking advantage of his strong bargaining relationship with most production managers and all labour managers, the convenor probably had some influence in making the procedure operate with a reasonable degree of fairness. In these circumstances the method had sufficient credibility among the ranks of shop-floor workers.

As was implied in the last quotation, the press operators were the most strategic group as regards labour mobility in this factory. Because their work required heavy physical effort, a comment frequently heard in these shops was that the job of press operator was suitable only for young workers who were prepared to perform physically demanding tasks in order to earn relatively good money. Some figures seemed to support this general impression. In October 1978, 105 (83 per cent) of the 127 press operators were under 40 years of age, and only two were over 50. By comparison, only 47 per cent of all the employees (hourly paid and staff) of the firm were under 40, and 28 per cent were over 50 years of age. The average age of the press operators was 33.8 years, compared with 42 years for all employees. At the same period, the press operators had an average of seven years of service in the Company, compared with twelve years for all employees. Therefore, the opportunity for press operators to get access to other jobs within the factory through internal vacancies became crucial at a certain stage in their working lives.

There were basically two routes for alternative work within the factory. The most important in terms of numbers was the access to direct production work in the daywork areas. There were also some possibilities of getting access to ancillary jobs. The other alternative, and by far the most rewarding in terms of job control, status and earnings, was a toolsetter job. There were 45 toolsetters at the time of the fieldwork,

and all of them had been press operators before. Entry to this trade was reserved exclusively for the press operators, and they had recently returned to the traditional system by which it was not possible for a worker to return to the press shop as toolsetter once he had left for another production unit within the factory. The press operators who wished to become toolsetters gave their names to a production manager who periodically chose those who would go on training for the job. From those who completed the training successfully, it was for management to decide who would get a setter job. Here again, management discretion to decide had not been challenged over recent years, and it was accepted that seniority was not the predominant factor. Although a degree of technical ability was certainly required in this particular case, a responsible and co-operative attitude on the part of the candidate would obviously been given the greatest consideration in the making of management decision to promote (Blackburn and Mann, 1979:103-11). This has to be pointed out as an important asset in the building up of management control and discipline. It may also be relevant to note that the shop steward function did not represent a handicap in this respect; many stewards had become setters over the years.

As for assignment and transfer of labour, a major contrast was observed in the way the shop-floor organisations in the two firms tried to have some influence on management decision-making. As compared with the preceding issues, however, the pattern was different. The procedure was much more formal at Firm A. Decisions were taken on the basis of a comprehensive written policy, on the elaboration of which the unions had some influence. In this firm the shop stewards as a group were more interested in and vigilant over this issue than the shop stewards in Firm B. The former were very attentive to management handling of the procedure on

internal promotion. As compared with the shop-floor organisation in Firm B, the Firm A shop stewards showed more concern over the seniority rule and the progression of the individual within the factories. In spite of these differences, it should finally be stressed that in both cases management had at their disposal an important asset for social control, that is the ultimate power to promote long-standing and co-operative employees.

This closer look at the mechanisms for internal progression in these workplaces also points to some of the reasons why the seniority rule has traditionally been less predominant in Britain as compared with the North American pattern of job control. Especially because of piecework and fragmented bargaining in engineering workplaces, there were not so many stable job hierarchies based on job classification and an internal wage structure. In North America such centralised job classifications and wage structures developed at a much earlier stage. Lazonick noted that internal job ladders had existed in large American companies even before the First World War (1983:126-7). In British factories, the reasons why manual workers wanted a move to other jobs were often related to the nature of the work or the opportunity for higher earnings, but this did not necessarily represent a 'promotion'. Hence at Firm B, leaving a press operator's job was seen, in most cases, as a move from strenuous and harsh work to a more relaxed working environment. But it also involved a loss of earnings. It was not an internal promotion but a move from the centre to the periphery of the work process and the pattern of control. In short, the work pace was slower and social relations were not so tense; but there was also less money involved. It was not a situation where everybody wanted to move to 'a better job'. Accordingly, there was less need for sophisticated regulations on internal progression to protect

workers from management favouritism.

With the institutionalisation of labour relations at workplace level in Britain, it will be interesting to see if the situation has developed on similar lines to the North American pattern. There were certainly indications of this happening at Firm A. In the machine shops, a worker could have access to better jobs in every respect, even within the same job classification (X5). We studied in some detail the formal procedure by which the progression within the ranks of manual labour was managed in this enterprise, under trade union control.

3. SOME CONTRASTS BETWEEN AND WITHIN THE FIRMS

The bulk of evidence presented so far in this chapter has established that there were two different patterns of worker control over deployment of labour. At Firm A, the shop-floor had relatively little control over assignment and transfer of labour. This was partly because the section was not a natural boundary for mobility and the shop steward organisation was not suited for detailed control over the worker contribution in the work process. It was shown in the preceding section, however, that shop stewards were active on the issue of internal progression. They had achieved some influence in protecting the individual against management discretion. Such a pattern of job control would appear to have something in common with the predominant pattern in North America, where unions are generally successful in negotiating administrative rules on issues such as labour mobility but do not interfere seriously with management control over aspects more directly related to the work process. In such a situation the shop-floor organisation does not raise the most crucial issue of the transformation of labour power into effort.

At Firm B it was reported that manual workers had developed an

important degree of job control over assignment of labour and transfer across the sections. This collective control was found to be particularly sophisticated in some areas. The pattern observed in this factory appeared to be somewhat typical of well organised engineering factories in the West Midlands. In many ways, shop-floor control over labour assignment in the press shops was reminiscent of the gang system which had a strong influence in Coventry engineering factories (Rayton, 1972; Melman, 1958:34-7; Freedman, 1977:212-15). It was argued that collective control over assignment of labour was not in itself detrimental to production, although it had major implications for management control at the shop-floor. In contrast, the issue of transfer of labour represented a serious problem for managers. They tried, without success, to come to terms with the shop-floor organisation on this matter.

In this chapter no general attempt is made to explain how these very different patterns had developed. Nevertheless, some mention was made of particular characteristics of the work process which fostered job control in the press shops and hindered its development in the machine shops. A fuller explanation will be developed in the following chapters. Moreover, it is felt that some contribution to an understanding of job control may be gained by studying the main differences observed <u>within</u> each firm. Hence the bulk of this concluding section deals with an analysis of contrasts within the organisations, starting with Firm B.

From what has been presented so far in the dissertation, it is possible to suggest a distinction between three patterns of job control in the areas which were studied most closely in this factory. There was, first, the craft control tradition, observed in the toolroom and in the tinsmith section. Both were 'one union shops' and were isolated from all movements of labour within the factory. In the case of the NUSMW members, the whole

process of job regulation was so peculiar that this area constituted an 'island' within the factory. In the toolroom, job control was also about the preservation of the craft tradition and status. The toolroom shop committee members saw themselves as the protectors of genuine skilled labour at the shop level and also in their relative position to the TGWU members.

A second pattern was characterised by the press operator type of job control. This appears to be typical of the nature and extent of control inspired by semi-skilled engineering workers with a robust shop-floor organisation. Their pattern of shop steward representation was highly favourable to job control. Most of them also worked on the basis of a piecework system which had been eroded over the years. However, it is argued in this dissertation that piecework was not the fundamental cause for the development of job control but only a contributory factor. More fundamental reasons are to be found in the nature of the work process, the material basis for the control problems faced by management.

A third pattern of job control was observed in the daywork production areas. Workers there had much less job control than the two other categories but their influence on labour utilisation was nevertheless much more important than that of manual workers at Firm A. It was noted that many of these dayworkers had been press operators before, and they were still part of the relatively strong TGWU domestic organisation. Although their control over assignment of labour and other specific aspects of the work process was relatively moderate, it was seen that they were very strong on issues such as transfer of labour, especially when it had some impact on overtime working. Finally, it has to be stressed that these three distinct patterns of job control are not presented here as general models of shop-floor action on labour utilisation. Their pertinence

for explaining differences in our case studies will also be evaluated in the light of the evidence presented in the following chapter.

By contrast, the evidence on Firm A shows that this shop steward organisation was more alert and influential on the issue of internal promotion than on the two other main issues discussed in this chapter. This observation raises an interesting question about the pattern of control which existed in the firm. Was it really a case where a stable workforce was strongly committed to the company and sought the gradual improvement of its situation within it? Our study of the composition of the labour force, presented in Chapter 3, showed this not to be the case. From the data on length of service and seniority it was possible to establish that the Firm A workforce was characterised by a high degree of instability of employment. This was particularly the case for the majority of immigrant workers in the foundry.

Indeed, this instability of employment was a major impediment to the development of a degree of labour cohesiveness necessary to seriously restrain management freedom as regards labour utilisation. Moreover, there was a cleavage between the workforces of the two factories, and their integration within a single domestic union organisation was more formal than real. While there was occasional union resistance in the machine shops, the worker organisation in the foundry was very weak. By being able to develop a coherent bargaining structure, as well as a disputes procedure, at company level, management was placing itself in a favourable strategic position. The whole structure of labour relations was established at the level which was most convenient for the management of two separate workforces producing in an integrated work process.

CHAPTER 7

WORKER CONTROL OVER EFFORT

It was emphasised in Chapter 1 that the contrast between the potential inherent in labour power and the constraints upon its realisation in the work process represents the most fundamental feature of the reality of control in the workplace. In focusing on control over effort, this chapter looks at the heart of this problem.

Starting from the distinction between labour power and labour, the first dimension of the problem is the indeterminate character of the employment contract. In practical terms this means that it is impossible to specify every aspect of labour utilisation at the time of employment, let alone the very amount of effort which should correspond to a given wage. This has to be determined at the point of production, on a day-to-day basis. But what makes it more problematic, and this is the second dimension of the problem, is the fact that in the process of converting labour into effort the interests of management and labour are contradictory. This is the very location and material basis of conflict in the workplace (see Edwards and Scullion, 1982a:1-9). It is in order to realise the optimal conversion of labour power into real effort in the work process, within these major constraints, that management has to organise a structure of supervision and control.

Although the analytical problem is presented in fairly general terms, the writer is aware of this being a very complex area of study. Also, the discussion centres on only some of the means by which organised workers develop a degree of control over effort. Moreover, the intention is not to present a complete picture of the situation in these three factories but to focus on departments and sections where the evidence is most likely to contribute to the analysis and argument of the thesis.

The first section deals with the various types of demarcation by which the nature and contours of jobs are defined. These lines of demarcation constrain management in the allocation of work to different categories of workers or to different shops. The two following sections discuss more directly the question of the effort bargain.[1] Although many scholars would define labour relations with reference to the wage-effort bargain, there has been relatively little empirical research on the 'effort side' of the exchange. This is particularly remarkable considering the long-standing debates on 'restrictive practices' and productivity. A typical weakness in the literature also consists in studying either pay bargaining or labour utilisation without proper consideration of the dynamics of effort and compensation, both aspects being part of the same ongoing process. Sections 2 and 3 may represent a modest contribution in this respect.

Section 2 introduces different patterns of control over effort under different work processes and payment systems. The third section focuses exclusively on the large press shops at Firm B. The main theme of this section is the notion of 'control over time'. While the importance of 'making out' under piecework is well established (especially Roy, 1953; Burawoy, 1979), it is suggested here that another major preoccupation of factory workers is control over their working time. Particular attention is given to the degrees of worker control over the intensity of effort and the distribution of effort over the whole shift, which are necessary to develop a degree of control over time.

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1. Baldamus (1961), the classic reference on this concept, used more commonly the term 'effort value'. The term 'wage-effort bargain' is also commonly used as a synonym.

1. JOB DEMARCATIONS

Batch production requires a high degree of flexibility of labour to meet the frequent variations in the flow of production. In the preceding chapter we saw that various regulations on assignment and transfer of labour allow different degrees of management freedom. The rigidity of demarcations between tasks, or conversely the amalgamation of related tasks, is another major determinant of flexibility of labour. In this section, attention centres on job demarcations based either on strict decomposition of labour, the enforcement of craft tradition, or boundaries between autonomous sections.

In the press shops, flexibility of labour was required most because of the predominance of short runs of production. The regulations on labour assignment, which were under worker control, permitted a fairly high degree of flexibility. However, there were restrictions to mobility of labour between sections, not only in the press shops but as a general rule in Firm B. It was also in these press shops that the strictest application of the principle of decomposition of labour was observed. There was absolutely no relaxation on the distinction between the types of task, i.e. setting, production, quality control, material handling, and maintenance. Indeed, there were additional demarcations within production (press operating, 'reclaim' and 'scrap balers' jobs), quality control (table inspectors, patrol inspectors and viewers) and maintenance jobs.

It was observed in Chapter 3 that in the case of the large Press shop no. 3 the members of ten different shop steward constituencies took part in the work process. These distinctions had been well established over the years and, being acknowledged by managers and workers, did not cause any friction or dispute at the time of the fieldwork. It did not matter whether they

originated in custom and practice or more universal craft demarcation. It is worth noting that such a sophisticated network of demarcations did not exist to any comparable extent in the daywork production areas which were more at the periphery of the production process such as, for instance, the Fitting and Welding no. 2 or the Copper Block sections.

In the machine shops (Firm A), whose work process was comparable to the press shops, the decomposition of labour was not as rigid. The major difference was that the machinists were setting as well as operating the machines on their work station. Although they had been setting for many years, this was first recognised as part of their job when in the wage structure negotiated in 1978 the grade of machinist (operator-setter, grade 5) was introduced as opposed to the grade of operator (grade 9). Prior to this the most usual sanction of the machine operators had been to refuse to do the setting when they had a dispute with management. So in practice management bought out a sanction which was based on control over job content. More important than the differential in the basic rate (£3.50 a week) was the substantial difference in the conversion factors of the two grades. The idea was to recognise and develop the engineering skills of the machinists and make them 'all-round specialists' on their specific work station. This also explains their autonomy and 'control over their job', an aspect discussed in Chapter 6. Indeed, the new piecework system introduced in 1975 also preserved a remnant of the traditional scheme which was called the 'supplement'. It meant that the machinists who worked on more demanding jobs in terms of skill got an additional bonus. When, during the research, a GMWU shop steward put forward a grievance which had the practical effect of playing down the 'skill differential', he could not count on the support of the JSSC.[2] It was felt fair to maintain the

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2. At the works council meeting we attended on 9 November 1978, the GMWU senior shop steward told management representatives that he did not support this grievance but that 'any shop steward has the right to put his claim through the procedure himself, if he does not have the support of the JSSC'.

the differential since, as the GMWU senior shop steward put it: 'Do you think it normal that a worker operating one or two machines could be paid exactly the same wage as another operating three or four of them?'.[3]

Finally, the foremen in the machine shops also worked as setters almost on a full-time basis. For this reason, and also because of the larger size of the batches produced, the relative number of toolsetters was much smaller than in the press shops. Along with the patrol inspectors (quality control), they were not regarded as genuine skilled workers by machinists and operators. Interestingly, toolsetters and patrol inspectors were very much at the bottom of the gross earnings table within the Company.

Compared with demarcations which follow the decomposition of labour, those based on craft tradition are more universal and widely accepted. Hence a management document dated January 1977 (Firm B) stipulated that 'all groups will be expected to co-operate in every possible way to improve efficiency by adapting to new methods of working, using any mechanical handling equipment deemed by the company to be necessary and removing all demarcation barriers with the obvious exception of closely-knit traditional craft areas'. Although even these traditional demarcations have been challenged in other engineering firms, for example British Leyland,[4] there was no evidence of this occurring in the firms studied.

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3. Informal interview, 22 November 1978.

4. The controversial programme imposed on the BL Cars workforce in 1980 stated the need for 'the introduction of more efficient methods of using available maintenance resources, including the elimination of trade demarcations and, with training where appropriate, the amalgamation of related trades' (Company Proposed Draft Agreement on Bargaining, Pay, Employee Benefits and Productivity, November 1979, art. 5.6). See also Robert Taylor, 'BL Takes on the Shopfloor', Observer, 25 November 1979, and 'A Step Towards Efficiency', Observer, 20 April 1980.

However, it was observed in both cases that while the status of genuine craftsmen, defined as those who had undergone an apprenticeship, was never challenged, this was not the case for those who got access to skilled jobs (such as toolsetting) through internal promotion.

Craft demarcation encompasses two different principles. One is the restriction of specific tasks exclusively to craftsmen. The other is the long-standing division between different trades. Although craft demarcation was not in itself an issue of contention during our fieldwork, its strict enforcement had implications which are of interest in the study of job control.

The main activity of the large toolroom at Firm B consisted of manufacturing and ensuring the maintenance of the tools of the presses, i.e. the 'tool' which is attached to the head of the press and the die which is fixed to its bottom part. The considerable discretion toolroom workers had on many aspects of their work meant that sanctions such as work-to-rule and withdrawal of co-operation were particularly effective. Instances which were enforced in recent years were following strictly every specification of the drawings so that production was slowed down; asking for all tools to be cleaned; enforcing strictly every safety rule; requiring regular assistance by the foreman, etc. But the most damaging sanction was the refusal of members of the repairing section to go down to the press shops and carry out immediate repairs on the tools, either directly on the press or on the shop-floor. Although the members of the repairing section were a minority of the toolmakers, they were sometimes mandated by the whole shop to apply this drastic sanction. The shop 'looked upon them as the area for sanction'[5] because their work was directly related

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5. Formal interview with a member of the toolroom shop committee, 19 September 1979.

to production. This specific type of pressure was applied early in 1979 in order to get a better differential in relation to the toolsetters, and also during the national engineering strike of the same year.

An example of this type of industrial action is particularly interesting in showing how the enforcement of job demarcations could make management dependent upon the co-operation of different occupational groups with complementary contributions to the work process. Local support for the national strike, which occurred during our observation in this plant, bore striking similarities with the situation reported by Edwards and Scullion (1982b) at the 'Components Factory'. While the series of one-day strikes in August was enforced without much discussion, the majority of the workforce did not wish to support the two-day strikes of September.[6] It was very much considered by TGWU members as a strike movement of the skilled unions, and especially the AUEW (Edwards and Scullion, 1982b:58). While the AUEW, NUSMW and NSMM were officially instructed not to work on 3 and 4 September, the TGWU shop stewards had to accept the wish of their members to come to work, although recommending them not to do so. However, a memorandum from the Company, distributed in the factory on the Friday prior to the strike, was rightly interpreted by employees as a recommendation not to cross the picket lines.[7] In spite of this, a minority of TGWU

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6. A factory meeting held on 28 August overwhelmingly rejected the strike call, against the JSSC's recommendation. The TGWU mass meetings of 31 August produced the same result in spite of all their shop stewards threatening to resign if they did not get the members' support for the national strike.

7. Sections 5 and 6 of this note from the personnel director read as follows: 'It is important to understand that whilst the factory will open on Monday, it may not be possible to operate effectively (. . .) or it may gradually become so. As a result, the Company would (. . .) need to send people home. Decisions on this will be made section by section.' It went on: 'Should any members of the AUEW, NUSMW and/or NSMM cross the picket lines, the Company will not be able to employ their services. To do otherwise would be to create insoluable post-dispute problems.'

members did cross the lines. The toolmakers felt that this could eventually break the strike support in the factory and, later in the week, stopped co-operating in the press shops in the way described above. This was done in order to put pressure on the TGWU and force them to stop their members crossing picket lines. The immediate effect was to force the JSSC to call a meeting with management and ask for the factory to be closed during the following two-day strike. The same afternoon (6 September) the Company agreed to meet this request.

This course of action was greatly resented by the TGWU majority. The toolsetters, members of this union, were to retaliate against the toolroom. While the toolmaker had the exclusive right to work on the tools, the responsibility of the toolsetter was to ensure the proper working of the press. More specifically, and partly for safety reasons, only he was allowed to take the tool out and put it back into the press once it had been repaired. For most of the day-shift on 7 September the toolsetters refused to carry out this particular operation. Because of clear demaraction lines, this had an immediate impact on production. The minutes of the labour-management meetings held during the day in order to settle the dispute contain the following:

> The setters felt that they were being pressurised by a minority group to be out on strike for two days . . .
>
> /The shop steward speaking/. The Setters felt that the Tool Room had become too powerful and the whole purpose of this exercise was a protest to prove that the Tool Room was not the only powerful group in the Company with the ability to close down manufacturing.
>
> /The general manager/. This was a tit for tat situation which could be seen by the Tool Room as an opportunity to have a go at the Setters again at a later date.

A striking feature of this episode was the position of management. They were not responsible for the events affecting production. They tried to calm it and did not wish in any way to take advantage of the division

within the workers' organisation. Their strategy was marked by the fear of further inter-union disputes resulting from a clash on the picket lines or the breaking of demarcation lines. Management was particularly afraid of losing the JSSC which was indeed under great stress over this period. The major preoccupation was to protect the institutional framework which, as has been shown, had been created with great difficulty over the last decade.

These events are also in themselves manifestations of a high degree of job control. As a general rule, a greater degree of job control increases the range of intermediate sanctions available to the workforce. Where a complex network of demarcation lines is enforced, as in the case presented here, management is even more dependent upon the co-operation of different groups, organised in different unions. Hence it may be noted that the type of sanction applied by the toolsetters would have been ineffective in the machine shops (Firm A) since this job territory was not exclusive to them. In the circumstances prevailing in the press shops, however, some groups had a high potential for disruption with little cost to themselves and a relatively small group of workers directly involved. The passive reaction on the part of management, which might have retaliated against a small group such as the toolroom repairing section disrupting production, may seem surprising. But management knew that the few workers directly involved had the full support of a broader section of the work-force. The organisation necessary for such a strategy of withdrawal of co-operation (Edwards and Scullion, 1982a:162-7) had been established. Indeed, it may be suggested that, as a general rule, job control and social organisation are likely to be found together since they are positively related.

A third type of job demarcation, in addition to demarcations based

upon decomposition of labour and craft distinctions, follows the dividing lines between particular sections. This type was observed only at Firm B. So far as these demarcation lines were acknowledged by management, they were not in themselves a source of conflict. During our fieldwork it was especially on the boundary around the tinsmiths that problems occurred, either in relation to the Fitting and Welding no. 2 or the Copper Block section. This is understandable considering the analysis of the NUSMW shop steward that the whole history of his union had been conditioned by the erosion of their job territory by dilution, mechanisation and the incursion of general unions. Edwards and Scullion (1982a:216-19) observed a comparable situation leading to demarcation disputes between NUSMW and TGWU members in the Small Metals Factory. As they explain (1982a:216):

> The clash with the general union was not the product of an irrational tendency of unions to squabble with each other but the result of the structure of the situation: a union that tries to deal with managerial challenges to its members' interests through 'closed' policies is likely to have disputes on the boundaries it has drawn around itself.

During the period of observation, such a demarcation dispute resulted in an eight-day strike by nineteen members of the Fitting and Welding no. 2 (FW2) section. Relations between the tinsmiths (skilled NUSMW members on piecework) and the FW2 section (semi-skilled TGWU and AUEW members on daywork) were generally poor, and particularly unfriendly between their respective shop stewards. The Automotive Heat Transfer unit (AHT) was particularly short of work over this period, the tinsmiths being on a four-day week and the FW2 workers not getting any overtime, a crucial issue in this section. There was an interesting custom and practice rule by which FW2 workers would always work longer hours than the tinsmiths over the week.[8] A major reason for this practice was that the

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8. Formal interviews with the section manager (18 September 1979) and the shop steward (20 and 21 September 1979).

FW2 section - a daywork section - was located between two piecework groups (one section of the press shops and the tinsmiths) in the flow of production. This was likely to produce bottle-necks in production. And FW2 members were also enforcing a restriction of output to make the bottle-necks more acute when they felt that management was not giving them proper working hours. At the time of the strike, the FW2 workers had also accumulated some grievances against local managers (who described this group as an 'awkward section'). The dispute arose when, following a minor breakdown in FW2, the section manager allocated a small number of components to the tinsmith area without consulting the FW2 shop steward. The section went on strike, in protest against the section manager breaking a local agreement secured in 1976. This agreement specified that 'absolute attention to detail must be paid when we are planning to change the location of work from one section to another, and no action should progress without the proper consultation taking place first'.[9]

The strike was prolonged by the fact that on its second day the Company refused to pay the wages for the time lost from its beginning. Because senior managers recognised that the dispute originated in a mistake by a member of their team, and the Company had issued telegrams asking the strikers to return to work, the workers argued that they should be paid. They quoted a precedent which had occurred a few years earlier when maintenance people had been paid in a similar context. The managing director refused the payment, insisting that he could not make legitimate such a breach of the disputes procedure, which should prevail even when a local substantive agreement had been broken. A few weeks later the general

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9. Memorandum from the then general manager of the Heat Transfer division (HTD) to the local manager, with copy to the shop steward, dated 16 August 1976.

manager issued a memorandum which in fact blamed local management for the strike. He first referred to the agreement quoted above and went on:

> On Wednesday, 7th July 1979, an incident involving the movement of work from Fitting and Welding 2 to the tinsmiths without prior consultation caused the subsequent industrial action taken by the members of Fitting and Welding 2, with the resultant loss of production until Friday, 13 July.
>
> I would remind you that recommendations made in the above mentioned memo . . . are endorsed by me, and that your section of management should be directed to adhere to the required working procedures.[10]

Although the protest had been very costly to them and had not stopped production in the AHT unit as they had expected, the strikers felt that they had made their point.

2. DIFFERENT PATTERNS OF CONTROL OVER EFFORT

2.1 Piecework and the Effort Bargain

The effort bargain is a consideration of great significance under any piecework system. It is crucial even for time-rate workers since the amount of effort has always to be determined, considering that there is almost inevitably a gap between the optimal use of labour power within particular technical conditions of production and the level of effort which is possible and acceptable in given social conditions. Hence Ditton has shown the extent of output restriction by workers on time-rate in a large factory bakery. He concluded that

> those on hourly pay do institute unofficial workplace controls in response to the lack of specifications about effort levels in the employment contract . . . these controls do not appear to be as sophisticated as those produced by men paid by the piece. However, their net effect is a better wage level created by reducing the amount of effort expended, whilst holding the wage constant. (1979:166)

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10. Memorandum from the general manager of HTD division to the unit and the section managers involved, with copy to the shop steward who led the strike, dated 7 September 1979.

This possibility had been recognised by Baldamus in his original work, and he considered that we should 'treat the concept of effort value as a tool of analysis that has general applicability, independent of the method of wage payment'(1961:98). As he pointed out, 'even under daywork, unless there is some tacit reference to prevailing effort values, the contract would not be workable . . . The only difference is that with piecework the relevant expectations become more accentuated and thus more conscious to the participants in the situation.'

Indeed, the point is that under piecework the issue of effort bargain represents a more central preoccupation in the minds of workers and production managers, and the process has much wider implications in terms of control. In the case of piecework, the question of the degree of utilisation of labour power, the capacity to work which is bought on the labour market, is raised openly. Indeed, the primary function of piece-work is to establish a direct relation between effort and monetary compensation, thereby reducing the need for direct control over labour by management. In confronting more directly this problem of transformation of labour power, however, piecework does not resolve it but only makes it a more salient and conflictual issue on the shop-floor. Conflict occurs regularly in the process of bargaining over the determination of the ratio of money to effort, and also over the related but different issue of the enforcement of the agreed standard in day-to-day production. Most of the evidence presented in sections 2 and 3 deals with the second aspect, i.e. the control gained and enforced by workers at the moment of producing under a given standard. This is a strategic area to look at since once effort is openly made a matter of bargaining, it becomes the dominant preoccupation of most production workers. This is probably more so when they work on the basis of several different ratios of effort to

wages over a single shift, as was frequently the case in the factories studied. It follows that workers usually develop some form of social organisation at work group or section level in order to exercise varying degrees of control over the utilisation of their labour power.

One way to illustrate the comprehensiveness of the effort bargain under piecework and thereby its wider implications for job control is to consider the subject of manning levels. In daywork production areas, manning levels were usually regulated through custom and practice, with particular cases being the object of fierce shop-floor bargaining. For those on piecework,on the other hand, manning levels were integrated in bargaining over the standard. The issues of manning, standard quantity and money were linked and represented the focus of piecework bargaining. The resulting agreement covered the three aspects. Where there was a change in conditions, for instance in a case where management added an operation (even a minor one), the shop-floor sometimes had a tactical choice between arguing for one more operator or a reduction in standard quantity. In most cases the preference was for an increase in manning levels. In fact, when enforcing a ceiling on earnings or working under a type of measured daywork as in Press shop no. 4, this was the only sound policy.

There were also disputes over manning levels which did not raise the question of the ratio of effort to money. One such dispute occurred in Press shop no. 4 in 1976. The following extract from the minutes of the joint meeting involving the general manager and the TGWU convenor is self-explanatory.

> A point made by [the shop steward] that on a previous run, a stacker [one-man operation] was put on the job, and by doing so, the Company had set a precedent for manning. The operators

> requested that the previous manning level be maintained as a status quo position until the job dispute had been fully discussed through procedure.
>
> The General Manager replied that there was no condition for a status quo and that under no circumstances could Management agree to the manning level being determined by local conditions at the time of one particular press run.[11]

Besides manning, there are other critical issues on which management action is constrained as a result of the operation of piecework. Obviously, the strength of the shop-floor organisation is an important factor. But even in the machine shops (Firm A) there were constraints to modifications in the work process which rested partly on the determination of the effort bargain. For instance, at the time of the research the production engineering manager had worked out a plan involving a complete reorganisation of the line 711F, which was producing a Ford component on a continuous basis. He was convinced that such a change would reduce manning and increase productivity. He had submitted the project to the shop stewards concerned for 'preliminary consultation'. But he never attempted to proceed with the proposal because it had been made clear that it would be resisted most vigorously. Management chose not to act partly because it did not wish to distort the delicate ratio of effort to wages once this had been agreed. It should be pointed out, however, that these workers would not necessarily have the power to resist a similar challenge now. When we last visited the factory in December 1979 management was already acting with less consideration for shop-floor power.

In the press shops, management freedom to organise production was certainly curtailed in many respects by the considerable degree of shop-floor control over the piecework scheme, a subject documented in section 3. To a greater extent than in the Firm A machine shops, there were major

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11. Minutes of the meeting held on 12 October 1976. Source: management files.

restrictions to changes in the layout of the presses for a given job. This was because any change in conditions raised the opportunity for the operators to challenge the standards. The allocation of work was obviously a major issue in which managers were limited by the extent of worker control over effort. The following analysis by the unit manager responsible for Press shop no. 3 and the Light section is significant:

> At the moment, we put jobs in presses where we have a standard. It restricts us quite a lot. It reduces our flexibility. We do not have piecework problems, but it is at the considerable price of losing some flexibility. There must be a serious need if we put something in presses or lines where there is no standard.[12]

To a large extent this situation had developed because, as press operators and production managers pointed out, it was almost always possible for an operator to resist when he was allocated a 'bad job'. He would clock out for some reason or other and in fact the forms of individual and group resistance were not always as subtle as those described by Roy (1952:436-41) in relation to goldbricking.

A related kind of restriction on management action was imposed by demarcations between sections of the press shops. In principle, there was no demarcation line between the shops. However, the 'right' to transfer jobs from one section to another was limited by whether or not a proper standard existed and by the need to gain the consent of press operators to work normally on the transferred job. Indeed, it should be noted here that standards were not transferable between shops. A standard was specific to the section where it had been agreed. There were, for instance, some jobs with 'double standards', i.e. different standards for production in either Press shop no. 3 or Press shop no. 4.

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12. Formal interview, 7 May 1980.

This sub-section has been concerned with a general discussion on the implications of different payment systems for various forms of control over effort. In the remainder of section 2, the main object is to outline the patterns of control observed in different production areas of the two firms. In view of the above argument about the importance of piece-work a brief account is presented of two areas which produced under piece-work systems. Section 3 will then look in more detail at control over effort and time in the press shops.

2.2 The Machine Shops

In order to make a general assessment of control over effort in the machine shops at Firm A it is necessary to set out briefly some characteristics of their work process. The best starting point would appear to be an observation of the most important production line which manufactured a particular Ford component. There were sixteen machinists and operators working on this line on day-shift and fourteen on night-shift. The machining of this component was performed at five successive work stations. The first two were linked work stations, in the sense that a mechanism automatically transferred the component from the first work station to the next. These workers were operating semi-automatic machines and hence their jobs were, to a large extent, machine-paced. In contrast, operatives executing the three subsequent grinding jobs were on separated work stations. They were also using non-automatic machines, which means that they did some manual work on every single component.

These different types of machinery had direct implications for pay and control over effort. Those working on the first part of the line did not control the crucial issue of work pace and hence they did not have complete discretion over the level of effort. They had only limited influence on the quantity produced and there was much less room for

speeding-up. As a consequence, the possibilities of high piecework earnings were restricted. Indeed, this led to short walk-outs (tactfully called 'unauthorised meetings') by all manual workers of the plant (both shifts) in September 1978. The workers argued that it was very difficult for workers on machine-paced jobs to earn the same level of incentive bonus as the others. Management maintained that it was fair for those putting in less physical effort to get less out of the incentive scheme. In contrast, there was greater variation in the earnings of the other group of pieceworkers. The majority of the high earners, and all the rate-busters, were on manually controlled jobs.

Nevertheless, management was generally in control of the effort bargain in the machine shops. On the line producing Ford components, those having a good deal of control over their level of effort were also working on isolated or separated work stations. Besides the weakness of their shop-floor organisation, this lack of integration between work stations was a major impediment to labour cohesiveness not only on this production line but in the machine shops more generally. A majority of the operators and machinists were assigned to isolated work stations, the others working in groups of between two and five workers. There was therefore comparatively little debate on manning levels. Since workers in the machine shops were assigned to the same work station for long periods of time (in sharp contrast to the press shops), there was therefore relatively little room for bargaining and conflict on two very crucial issues. This is very different from the organisation of work in the press shops where issues such as assignment of labour and manning levels made the link between control over labour utilisation and over pay determination.

Hence it is argued here that particular aspects of the work process in the machine shops set the structural basis for limited labour cohesiveness and solid managerial control over effort and labour utilisation in

general. It did not provide the appropriate environment for worker resistance at the point of production. However, this is only part of an explanation for management control over the effort bargain. Attention is now directed to the negotiation of a sophisticated tool of management control in the shape of the payment system.

Following the reform, the basic rates were negotiated annually with the JSSC at company level. More unusual was the negotiation at the same level of different piecework conversion factors (called 'incentive levels') for different job grades. Variations were high and this could make a substantial difference in the pay packet. There was no explicit rationale for the ranking but key jobs in the work process, those on which a high operator performance was of crucial importance, had significantly higher conversion factors. The conversion factor for the machinists was also much higher than that of the operators. About 65 per cent of the piece-workers in the machine shops worked on the basis of individual standards which they had usually negotiated by themselves, with some support from shop stewards at the later stage of bargaining. The standards were signed by the machinists or operators directly concerned. Clearly, piece-work bargaining was not conducted by a work group or a section under the leadership of the shop steward, as was generally the case in the press shops. The piecework scheme was also tight because of the preponderance of genuine work study from the mid-seventies onwards. This was conducted for management under the firm hand of the production engineering manager, a strong character who contributed greatly to the establishment of firm management control over performance in this company.

During the main period of fieldwork in 1978, the average operator performance in the machine shops was about 118 per cent of the piecework

standard.[13] During our follow-up research we had access to a complete summary of piecework performance which shows that for the week ending 7 December 1979 the average performance in the machine shops was 130 per cent (compared with 134 per cent in the foundry and 132 per cent for the two factories). The detail of these figures and an interview with the production engineering manager suggest that this increase reflected to a large extent an improvement in labour productivity, with a comparable level of output being achieved with lower manning levels. The minutes of the 1980 pay negotiations (conducted in late November 1979) indicate, however, that management was slightly concerned about the piecework scheme getting looser. In informal interview, the GMWU senior shop steward argued that management had to bear the responsibility for having allowed people to go above 125 per cent, which was meant to be the maximum figure when the scheme was negotiated in 1975. He said that some rate-busters were 'fiddling the clock' (increasing down time) but that shop stewards could not do anything about this since 'it is up to management to watch fiddling'.[14] We had access to figures showing that the piecework earnings of some machinists were far higher than the average in 1978. Managers pointed out that a small number of rate-busters could be tolerated, especially if they were workers recognised for their exceptional skills, but that care should be taken not to raise the general expectations.

But the piecework system was by no means out of management control.

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13. For the week ending 6 January 1978, the average performance in the machine shops was 114 per cent; it was 121.3 per cent in the week ending 5 May 1978. In the week ending 1 December 1978, the average performance for the two plants was 117.3 per cent. In an interview conducted on 28 November 1978, the production manager confirmed that 118 per cent was a very good estimate.

14. Interview conducted on 14 December 1979.

First, managers would get from the computer a complete series of data on production and pay for every operator, on a weekly basis. They had the necessary tools to compare the performance of individual workers, work groups or departments over time, between shifts, etc. At a works council meeting, the personnel director 'reiterated that he was entitled to check performance under 90 and over 120. If found to be accurate the performance would be paid, but if there is any challenge the operator concerned and his representative will be present.'[15] Secondly, an average performance of 130 per cent (which was recorded late in 1979) is not really excessive. Indeed, an average rate which is too low always bears the risk of acting as a disincentive. With a figure of 130, it is estimated that the operators were getting (on average) about 12 per cent of their earnings out of piecework and the machinists 18 per cent. Therefore the proportion of variable earnings was still relatively low, especially when one considers the sophistication of the structure of control over effort which was built into this piecework scheme. Again, the amount of down time was quoted by senior managers as a major problem. Over a period of one week ending 1 December 1978, down time represented about 18 per cent of working hours in the machine shops and exactly 21.5 per cent of working hours for the two factories. Over the first week of December 1979, the figures were 19.7 per cent for the machine shops and 23.1 per cent for the two factories. But here again, the data coming out of the computer, from the information registered on the piecework cards, provided the necessary information for putting the finger on the problem area and increasing supervision in relation to a specific problem in a specific working area. Indeed, the information was broken down by department for each of the

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15. Minutes of the meeting held on 17 August 1978.

seventeen categories of down time.

The above considerations also explain why management could enforce relatively loose supervision and remain in command of the operations. But the two main observations in this sub-section are the following. First, management had been successful in organising, with or without any strategic consideration, a work process which set the right conditions for management control. Secondly, they were able to build upon it a piecework scheme which further facilitated management control over effort.

2.3 The Tinsmiths and Craft Control

In studying control over effort, it is interesting to look briefly at a small group of NUSMW members who enforced an exceptionally high degree of control over this aspect of work. It was craft control of a particular nature since these were production workers. As a result of lack of investment in technology and very little innovation in work organisation in general, this production unit had become uncompetitive for the volume passenger car market. The production of automotive radiators was limited to repairing, the commercial vehicles, and the so-called specialist markets. Accordingly, the number of tinsmiths had declined rapidly from about 200 in 1959 to 38 in 1979.

The tinsmiths were producing on the basis of a very traditional piecework scheme based on prices. There was no work study of any kind (as a rule, there was 'no clock' allowed in this shop) and operatives did not clock in and off when changing jobs. A job to be priced was tried for a while by a cross-section of the members. A price would then be submitted to the section manager by the shop steward. If they did not agree, the shop steward would go back to the shop for reconsideration. Both sides agreed that the process of bargaining prices was not really problematic. Collective control over production and earnings was absolute. They operated

a ceiling on earnings (called 'restrictive practice' by the managers concerned) and nobody could earn more (nor less in practice) than the 'striking rate' of £1.10 per hour in 1979.[16] The practice, much in line with NUSMW policy, had operated 'since the shop exists', in the words of the shop steward, and was accepted by management as a matter of fact. Besides the 'advantages' for management of stable production and labour costs, this was made acceptable by the high degree of collective discipline which characterises this union. On the one hand, the union assured management of skilled labour, high quality standards and good workmanship. On the other hand, collective discipline meant that a sheet metal worker had to spread effort over the whole shift, and any member 'making the price look too high' might have to answer for his behaviour. The shop steward checked the piecework cards, and overbooking or excessive utilisation of the 'back of the book' were also matters for discipline by the shop committee. Any member behaving in a way likely to bring the union into disrepute could be subject to sanction. This member could appeal to the shop committee, and then the district, in accordance with the formal rules and traditions of this highly democratic union.

From the early seventies, management policy had been to eliminate all piecework schemes not based on work study. As a result of the 1973 wage negotiations, the then managing director took it for granted that the tinsmiths had agreed to freeze their piecework earnings in return for other considerations. But there was no written agreement. The tinsmiths did not increase their ceiling between 1973 and 1977, when this issue led to a major dispute. When the shop advised the Company of their decision

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16. In 1979, all the NUSMW members earned £44 from piecework, in addition to a basic rate of £51.34 and a supplement of £4.84, for a weekly earning of £100.18.

to 'speed-up' in February 1977, management refused and claimed this was in breach of the above agreement. The tinsmiths increased their production according to the collective decision and the Company refused to pay above the ceiling. Following a go-slow and later a withdrawal of co-operation, management was forced to accept a reference to ACAS arbitration to determine whether the tinsmiths 'have at any time agreed with the management to restrict their earnings to any predetermined or existing levels'.[17]

A major problem for management at the time of the hearing was that the managing director involved in these discussions had since left the Company. He could not say with certainty or produce written evidence that he had reached a definite agreement in 1973. The NUSMW, for its part, was able to produce a union shop record dated 1973 which stated, among other things, that 'this agreement did not in any way restrict the Shop from Speeding-up, but to talk about it first, before doing so'.[18] The district officer also emphasised that 'the Tinsmiths regarded their unilateral right to determine their level of piecework earnings as sacrosanct. This was a key feature of the trade and no one group of tradesmen would be allowed to "sell" that right.'[19] Their policy was presented in more detail in the Union's Statement of Case:

> It should be noted that when considering a speed-up of piecework, our people, acting in what we believe to be a responsible manner, have at all times taken the following into consideration:

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17. Terms of reference stated in the Minute of Appointment of the arbitrator, dated 19 July 1977.

18. Quoted in the Report and Award of the ACAS arbitration, dated 30 August 1977, paragraph 9(3). It also stated: 'The view was expressed by the Company that the copious notes referred to by the Union were no less subject to distortion than the recollections of a manager. They were not an objective and agreed record' (paragraph 11(6)).

19. Report and Award of the ACAS arbitration, paragraph 9(1).

1. The state of the order book.
2. The present stock situation.
3. The unemployment situation in our trade in Coventry.
4. Availability of parts and flow of materials.[20]

The district officer pointed out that on the basis of these criteria there had simply been no justification for a speed-up at Firm B during the 1973-1977 period. In the past, there had even been occasions when it had been necessary to reduce earnings.[21] The arbitrator felt that this line of argument was 'marginally more convincing' than the evidence submitted by management. Hence he awarded in favour of the union in that they had not renounced the possibility of speeding-up and increasing their piecework earnings.

On the face of it, management's position on this issue certainly appears highly paradoxical. They were fighting against a 'straight speed-up', i.e. workers wanting to produce more for more money. Bearing in mind that 56 per cent of the tinsmiths' earnings was not based on piecework anyway, the management's stance may be seen as irrational. And if the tinsmiths could not increase their ceiling on earnings, they could hardly increase their output at all. Indeed any level of piecework drift would gradually reduce the output per worker.[22] In a formal interview the managing director accepted that this interpretation was correct but argued that the Company had to follow a different rationale because of

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20. ibid., paragraph 9(4).

21. ibid.

22. The district officer took up this point and commented that 'there was something perverse if at a time of economic crisis when the merits of harder work were being extolled his members could not be encouraged to increase their output and earnings'. ibid., paragraph 18(3).

specific constraints. There were three basic reasons for management's position. The first was the pressure that an increase in the tinsmiths' earnings would put on the wage structure, with leapfrogging and differentials problems. At the time this was a matter of contention, in particular with toolmakers and maintenance workers. In this context the small numbers of employees directly involved had to be considered in comparison with the Company's total workforce and labour costs. The second reason was that, although it was presented as a 'straight speed-up', management expected that the tinsmiths would gradually return to bargaining over piecework prices so that the previous level of effort would eventually be restored. Management was implicitly adopting the view that there was such a thing as a 'natural' level of effort to which workers with such a high degree of control were bound to return.

Indeed the third reason was related to this traditional type of job control. The managing director repeated in interview that the tinsmiths were the 'last of the industrial dinosaurs' and that it was a 'self-fulfilling prophecy' that they would make themselves obsolete.[23] Hence managers saw it as a dramatic problem of attitude on the part of these workers. There was just 'nothing you could do' with the tinsmiths; senior managers were inclined to feel that they could only let the market forces eliminate them gradually from the factory, sooner rather than later. As a matter of fact, under the Recovery Plan advocated by the management team by the end of our fieldwork in 1980, the tinsmiths would have had a very limited role to play. Following the take-over of the factory in August 1980, the size of the workforce was reduced even more sharply and by 1981 there were no NUSMW members working in this factory any more.

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23. Formal interview, 13 May 1980.

The degree of worker control discussed in this sub-section is in many ways exceptional. Yet this type of collective control over effort and earnings does not appear to be untypical within this craft union representing direct production workers. The NUSMW is characterised by strong organisation and discipline at shop level. For instance, Edwards and Scullion (1982a:202-9) have documented their complete control over issues such as recruitment and overtime in the Small Metals Factory. What is also fascinating for analytical purposes is the extent to which management may be prepared to carry on production without 'detailed control' over the work process (Hyman and Elger, 1981:116-17; Edwards, 1983:20-22), an issue which will be discussed in the following chapter. A final observation which emerges from this sub-section is that in a rapidly declining position in the product market both sides acted in a way which, to some extent, appeared to be in conflict with their own 'interests'. Eventually the structural forces prevailed and management and labour could no longer secure a continuation of the employment relationship, a reminder of their structural interdependence with regard to production.

3. CONTROL OF TIME IN THE PRESS SHOPS

In Manufacturing Consent, Burawoy put a great deal of emphasis on the notion of 'making out', which he presented as a major preoccupation on the part of pieceworkers (see also Roy, 1953). In documenting this, he was also able to express convincingly the feelings of machine shop workers with whom he had worked, and the shop-floor culture of this factory (1979: especially chapter 4).

While the notion of 'making out' is well established in the literature, it is suggested here that 'control of time' is a concern of no less significance for factory workers. By this, we refer essentially to worker

control of the use of their working time. Hence one of the basic principles of worker behaviour in these three engineering factories was the intensification of effort during certain periods of time in order to build up a reserve of working time to be taken as long breaks or a longer period of leisure at work. In all cases, the period of reference for workers to organise their working time was one shift. In the case of the press shops, there were always opportunities for operators to 'get in front' and accumulate leisure at work so that they could finish early. For this reason, and although variable degrees of control over time were observed in other production areas, this section focuses exclusively on the study of the structure and process by which press operators could, to a certain extent, manage their working time. Particular attention is given to the control over the work process which is necessary for any group of workers to achieve this.

Although some of the evidence presented here may be specific to a single factory, most of the analytical considerations have a broader application. Arguably, the notion of control of time is a more universal one than 'making out'. The two aspects are obviously related, but the point here is that worker control of time is not limited to work under a specific payment system (such as piecework or measured daywork). Indeed, it is not thought to be exclusive to factory work. Pfeffer, following his participant observation in an engineering factory in the United States, discussed at length this aspect of working time, and especially the notion of 'doin' time' (1979: chapter 4). He argued that 'during a working life the salient factor shaping the experience of time for most employees is that time itself, even more than labor power, is what workers are conscious of selling on an hourly basis to the employing company for wages' (1979:72).

The object of this section is not to describe and analyse the whole

process of piecework bargaining. This has already been documented at length, and the study of the British engineering industry by Brown (1973) is the most apposite. The interest here is on control over time and over effort more generally. In the press shops, however, many facets of control were entangled with the piecework system so that its study is appropriate in so far as it illustrates this particular pattern of control. After an introduction to the working of this piecework scheme, the discussion is structured on the basis of an analytical distinction between the immediate intensity of effort and the continuity or distribution of effort over the whole shift.[24]

3.1 The Press Shop Piecework System

Although the basic rate of the 134 press operators (in August 1979) was negotiated as part of the annual wage negotiations, in practice it could only be settled by the operators' acceptance of the deal, in the sense that they would not agree to be outvoted by the factory workforce. It was also at this level, i.e. at divisional level and across the sections of the press shops, that they negotiated many items of the mechanics of piecework such as the conversion factor, the price for waiting time, specific allowances, etc. Finally, it was underlined in Chapter 6 that while discussion on piecework standards usually invclved the whole shop in the case of Press shop no. 4, bargaining was more often limited to the level of the work group in the cases of Press shop no. 3 and the Light section.

A question underlying much of the discussion here is the extent to which this piecework system was a tool for management control or, conversely, a mechanism facilitating worker control over effort. In short, the material

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24. This distinction was first brought to our attention by Dubois and Monjardet (1979:8).

to be presented will show that piecework was in a state of decay at the time of our research and that this had implications for the whole pattern of control. The best single indicator to illustrate this is the average piecework performance, i.e. the ratio of output in relation to the piecework standard. In the week ending 5 October 1979, the average piecework performance stood at 302 per cent, as compared with 305 per cent over the week ending 19 October. Although our series of data on this ratio is limited, complementary sources of information also indicate that the expected yield on piecework jobs was about 300 per cent at the time of our observation in the second half of 1979.

But there are two important reservations here. First, the above ratio was based on what had been booked (as distinct from what was actually produced) by operators when they reported on piecework jobs; the process by which they could reduce the period of reference and hence increase this ratio will be explained at a later stage. Second, this was the ratio when press operators were actually on piecework time. The problem for management was that they were clocked on piecework for a very limited period of time during the shift. Over a period of seven weeks in September and October 1979, the operators reported to be on piecework jobs for 36.7 per cent of working time, and this was an improvement in comparison with the previous year.[25] They were also producing on the basis of a daywork scheme for 19.7 per cent of their working time. And they were on down time for a high 43.9 per cent of their working time. From the data collected, it is possible to estimate that when considering piece-

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25. Over a period of eight months starting in March 1978, they were on piecework time for 26 per cent of the working time, with 28 per cent of working time on agreed daywork and 46 per cent on down time.

work, day work and down time, the press operators' average pay (excluding any shift or overtime premium) corresponded to a performance of about 240 per cent, i.e. a ratio of 2.4 times the average piecework standard. That is a very important figure. It means that any piecework standard with an expected yield of less than 240 per cent was not a real incentive and was not worth any intensification of the work pace. Indeed, the expected yield, or the going ratio for piecework jobs, was more in the range of the above figure of 300 per cent.

Another significant manifestation of this inflationary movement in piecework standards is worth mentioning. As explained in Chapter 4, following the 1969 strike on the crucial issue of the level of effort when there was a dispute over a standard rate, a so-called 'dispute rate' of 135 per cent was agreed at the Composite Conference held in March 1970. This meant that operators would not produce below the 135 ratio when enforcing sanctions in the process of piecework bargaining. In 1979 press operators would slow down to such a production ratio only in exceptional situations: it had become too costly a sanction for them. Indeed, payment for waiting time had been increased from 85 to 150 per cent in 1974, and then to 175 per cent in the 1979 wage settlement. Not surprisingly, operators were looking for means to go 'on the clock' rather than reduce their piecework performance to a low 135 per cent. Since the waiting time payment also applied to time at the surgery or even to mislocations or 'crunches' (if management could not prove these to be cases of sabotage), there were numerous opportunities for experienced pieceworkers to do so.

A piecework scheme where the average performance was three times the standard rate agreed between the parties could certainly be described as very loose. The basic standard had lost any significance as a basic level of effort and the gap between the point of reference for bargaining purposes

and the actual level of production was so wide that the system had lost its credibility. Any pretence of work study was a technical mechanism of standard determination could no longer be taken seriously in the Presswork division. The determination of the effort bargain was therefore plainly a matter of bargaining.

3.2 Control over the Immediate Intensity of Effort

As a general rule, the key factor for control over the immediate intensity of effort is the type of machinery used. This characteristic of the work process was crucial in the press shops. All the presses were non-automatic machines and the operators had to intervene in the production of every single component. Many presses could go up and down for a maximum of 900 strokes per hour. That is the optimal level of effort which could technically be achieved. Effectively, on many jobs, it was possible for operators to produce at the optimal level over short periods of time and they regularly did so. But obviously this was by no means a normal or an acceptable level of effort. The point is that work pace was under the operators' control. When producing on lines, the pace would be established by the rhythm of production of the whole work group, but even in these cases an operator had to push the button on every single press, for every component.

There was, therefore, a huge gap between the limit set by the technical conditions of production and the level of effort to be determined by power relationships on the shop-floor or, in other words, as a result of a social process. This set the material basis for two phenomena studied here. One is the long tradition of hard piecework bargaining which was discussed in Chapter 4. Standards of production were not really conditioned by technical factors and this is what made work study particularly vulnerable. And under the prevailing social relations in

production, they could not be dictated by management: they were to be the object of very hard bargaining. Under the influence of a robust shop-floor organisation, which itself had developed very much in the process of bargaining over the ratio of effort to wages, the piecework scheme had gradually deteriorated to the state described in this chapter. The second phenomenon stemming from this worker control over the intensity of effort was the process by which the operators could speed-up, 'get in front', and accumulate leisure in work. Control over work pace, very much conditioned by the type of machinery, may therefore be considered as the starting point in the development of worker control over many issues in these press shops.

It should be emphasised that describing the piecework scheme as being loose and discussing the operators' control over the intensity of effort is not to argue that people were either working hard or not working hard. Questions such as the absolute level of output or the rate of surplus value are not within the scope of this dissertation. To tackle these matters would require different analytical tools and the gathering of information of a different nature. The focus here is on control over labour utilisation. Hence, assuming that press operators had a high degree of control over the intensity of effort, they could still produce at a relatively fast or a relatively slow pace. Indeed, much of the discussion here is about the process by which they controlled effort so that they could work very hard for particular periods of time and more slowly or not at all for other periods during the same shift.

Bearing in mind the above consideration, another issue related to the immediate intensity of effort is relevant here. That is the organisation of collective output restriction, the focus of Roy's major work (1952). He discussed two forms of output restriction, i.e. goldbricking and

quota restriction. Collective output norms require an appreciable degree of social organisation and Edwards and Scullion (1982a:170,176) reported that they were not universal, even in the West Midlands engineering sector. In their Components factory, as in the Firm A machine shops, there were no quota restrictions and rate-busters were tolerated.

At Firm B there was considerable variation between areas of production. The tinsmiths had complete collective control over output, a situation described at length in the preceding section. Such an institutionalised form of output restriction did not exist elsewhere in the factory. There were significant contrasts even between different sections of the press shops. In Press shop no. 3 and in the Light section, the ceiling on earnings was established at 300 per cent for every single piecework job. The shop stewards were responsible for the enforcement of this maximum limit in their section. Evans, who also studied the situation in the press shops, reported that

> of the six current stewards interviewed, four confirmed they had an 'understanding' with the work-study engineers, by agreement with their sections, that they would be notified by the former of any operator exceeding the limit. Only one then had the authority, after notifying the individual(s) to change their piecework bookings. (1980:73)

The situation was totally different in Press shop no. 4. From 1974 to May 1979, this section worked on the basis of a form of measured daywork called 'agreed daywork' in this factory (to emphasise that this was the outcome of negotiation, not work study). The scheme proved to be a disaster in terms of productivity, and on management's insistence one shift (shift B) agreed to return to piecework in 1979, the members of the other shift (shift A) rejecting these proposals. The new series of piecework standards for producing clutch covers and back plates, under which the operators on shift B decided to 'sell' the agreed daywork scheme, could objectively be classified as very loose. At the time of the observation, those on piecework were producing at full strength, taking advantage of the

new scheme without any collective output restriction. They were producing more than twice the output of the other shift with whom they would alternate on a four-week basis. This was regarded with some resentment by press operators in other sections. They would comment that 'they had gone mad since they are back on piecework', a behaviour seen as lacking collective discipline. By doing this, it was felt that press operators were making a mess of the whole piecework system. This could legitimate a management offensive and jeopardise the progress achieved over many years on the effort bargain.

The case of Press shop no. 4 gives an insight into the rationale for the collective output norms applied elsewhere. When asked about the reasons for enforcing a ceiling, the shop stewards and other press operators usually put first the need to protect the standards. A principle of piecework bargaining was to 'preserve the best standards'. There were many standards on the basis of which it was not possible to produce at the ceiling level (300 per cent); the principle was to concentrate on improving these, not to abuse the better ones. Although there was no evidence of rate-cutting, the ceiling was therefore relevant in relation to the strategy on piecework bargaining. A second reason put forward by some operators was the need to protect work, i.e. to make sparing use of the reserve of production orders. In a factory where the product market was not stable, it was felt to be sound policy to take account of short-time job opportunities. Thirdly, and at least as important, there was the need for group cohesiveness, for a minimal level of collective spirit. Rate-busters and other manifestations of selfishness were seen as unacceptable sources of tension and division.

3.3 Control over the Distribution of Effort

Worker control over the continuity and distribution of effort during

a whole shift generally requires higher degrees of control over the work process and more extensive social organisation than simple control over the pace of work. In this instance, workers are involved in the 'management of time' in the sense that they plan and organise their working day. It is possible to conceive of a situation where management defines the overall daily production while allowing a high degree of autonomy to the workforce in the phasing of production. But in the case observed here, the considerable degree of worker control over time was also used to limit the overall amount of effort and production. Hence this was a crucial area of control taken from management.

It is useful to draw an analytical distinction between two degrees of control over the distribution of effort. These will be called 'making time' and 'accumulating time'. The first expression has been coined by Ditton (1979:162-3) and refers to a situation where operators take advantage of their control over the immediate intensity of effort to 'get in front' and hence earn limited periods of discretion, or 'breaks' on the shop-floor. Obviously the work process in the press shops provided a fertile ground for the operators to speed up and 'make time' to a considerable extent. They certainly did so, also taking advantage of the rather loose piecework system.

But 'making time' is still a relatively basic form of control over effort and it was present, to varying degrees, in all the piecework situations observed in these three factories. In the large machine shops (Firm A), for instance, the usual pattern was that many operatives could regain discretion over their working time for short periods, just enough for long tea-breaks and conversation with workmates, in a casual and relaxed way, on the shop-floor. The teams of pieceworkers working on the pouring tracks in the foundry could go a bit further and achieve a limited accumulation

of working time over the shift. It was observed that from about one hour before the end of the day-shift, they worked fast and on a collective basis to wind up production and clean their working areas to that they earned a period of about 35 minutes of leisure. Although washing-up time was included in this latter period, it appeared that their only constraint was not to leave the factory before the end of the shift.

Although making time was fairly common in all three factories, this is not to say that 'making out' (or reaching an appreciable piecework performance in the press shops) was easy or natural for all manual workers. This was dependent upon skills acquired as part of the learning process on very specific job requirements. Workers needed an understanding of the intricacies and politics of piecework as well as some familiarity with technical aspects and 'angles' of specific jobs, so that they could 'beat the clock'. On this, Ditton (1979:161-2) observed that experienced operators were able to take advantage of apparently more difficult jobs which offered better opportunities for time-manipulation (see also Burawoy, 1979:64).

While the practice of 'making time' is quite usual, although by no means universal, the accumulation of time off requires a higher degree of worker control over effort and time. Yet the latter is also more attractive to operators and more pervasive in its consequences for the character of work. The accumulation of non-working time has significant implications for management control because it involves the manipulation of time on a relatively large scale. The expression 'accumulation of time' refers to the consolidation of high levels of effort and production over a substantial number of hours so that a worker can build up a reserve of time-off within the duration of the shift. The expression 'reserve of time-off' is deliberately rather vague: it is meant to refer to a period

of non-working time which is, by any standard, longer than what may be considered a mere tea-break.

The matter under discussion here is more substantial than the issue of tea-breaks. It is also much more problematic because, as a general rule, accumulation of time off is not recognised as acceptable and legitimate by managers. In the press shops, for instance, the question of tea-breaks was not really an issue. Press operators did not argue for longer tea-breaks, mainly because on most jobs they could make and accumulate time-off during the shift. Eventually afternoon tea-breaks were 'sold' for the whole factory, as part of the funding for the 1979 wage increase. This was not so great a concession from press operators, as the wording of the clause indirectly suggests:

> There will be no fixed afternoon tea breaks, with the consequent result of straight through working. This will not prevent individuals from consuming beverages or food during the afternoon provided that normal working is maintained.[26]

In the study of control over labour utilisation, the issue of accumulating time is particularly interesting on two grounds. The first question is the process by which workers can take advantage of the work process to build up and accumulate periods of time-off. Allowing for piece rates which are sufficiently loose for accumulating a substantial period of labour time, an operator has to be allowed to speed-up and produce time-off in the first place. The second hurdle in relation to management control is for the workers to have the opportunity to enjoy whatever period of time-off they have actually produced and accumulated. This condition may be at least as important as the preceding one. For instance, Ed Sokolsky, 'one of the better operators on the line', was quoted by

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26. 'Hourly Paid Wage Settlement, 1979', article 2.4.4.

Roy (1952:432) as saying that

> he always makes out for ten hours by eleven o'clock, that he has nothing to do from 11:00 to 3:00, and has even left early, getting someone to punch his timecard for him
>
> 'That's the advantage of working nights', said Ed. 'You can make out in a hurry and sit around, and nobody says anything. But you can't get away with it on day shift with all the big shots around. Jack has to take it easy on these housings to make them last eight hours, and that must be tough.'

Most managers disapprove of workers 'doing nothing' for appreciable periods of time. Even if workers have reached their quota of production, managers usually argue that workers are employed, and have their basic rate paid, for 40 hours a week.

Therefore, where workers are able to enjoy at least part of their accumulated time off, a distinction can be made between three types of situations. Workers may be allowed to spend some time loafing on the shop-floor, in the area nearby their work station. They may also be allowed to leave their working area and have some leisure elsewhere within the factory, as in the case under study here. Finally, they may 'extend leisure in work into leisure outside work', as in the rather exceptional case observed by Edwards and Scullion (1982a: 102-3) at the Large Metals Factory where workers had devised informal rotas by which they could leave the factory 'for periods of time off lasting up to half a day'. In fact, this practice is exceptional only in factory work, since 'job-and-finish' is fairly common among other types of work (refuse collectors, milk delivery men, etc.).

In the press shops, there were three different and complementary resources through which press operators were able to make and accumulate time off. First, attention has already been given to their control over the work pace, the basic resource for speeding-up and making time. The second group of resources encompasses those originating in shop-floor

regulation. Many were the result of bargaining, such as loose piece-work standards or generous manning levels. For example, the agreed daywork scheme would come into this category. Others were imposed unilaterally by the shop-floor: the principle of mutuality, the 'right' for a pieceworker to speed-up, the 'right' to swop jobs after x number of components (which fosters cohesiveness and makes management retaliation more risky), or the right to stop work when the target is reached. It follows that there were opportunities for making and accumulating time which were built into the system. There was no need to break the rules to get in front substantially: it could be done by using skills and shrewdness in interpreting the rules of the game.

A third resource which was particularly important for accumulating time, however, involved the bending and breaking of rules. That was the practice of 'fiddling the clock' or 'chiseling'. Borrowing from Roy, Burawoy defined chiseling as a practice which 'involves redistributing time from one operation to another so that operators can maximize the period turned in as over 100 per cent' (1979:58). This is a useful definition, although in the press shops chiseling was not only based on redistribution of time between piecework jobs, a practice called cross-booking. The operators were also taking advantage of periods booked on down time (especially 'waiting time') or on agreed daywork to start producing on a piecework job so that they could 'get in front' substantially and accumulate time off. In this factory it was called 'fiddling the clock'. The basic principle involved reducing the period of reference for a given production on a piecework job. Because of the predominance of small batches and the very fragmented nature of the work process, the operators might have several occasions to do so in a single shift. Evans, who had been the press operators' steward

in the Light section, observed that 'changes in work schedules, movements between jobs and countless causes of production interruptions aided operators to extend their "relaxation" periods, or exploit their "waiting time" allowances to boost piecework bonuses' (1980:67).

The immediate effects of 'fiddling the clock' were to inflate the ratio of piecework performance and, to some degree, to be paid twice for a given period of working time (i.e. waiting time allowance in addition to higher piecework bonus). The more general effect was a significant contribution to the making and accumulation of a surplus of effort and time, to be consumed before the end of the shift. A crucial point here is that workers were paying attention to the effort side of the bargain. The very high proportion of down time, to which reference was made earlier, provides some evidence for their success. This was the main concern of production managers in the press shops who felt that the payment system was not good enough to motivate operators to produce more. Hence chiseling was not used to boost earnings but to limit effort. In such a situation, the 'game of making out', which otherwise could be quite acceptable to management (Burawoy, 1979), did not turn out the level of productivity that they were looking for.

This phenomenon was most prominent under the agreed daywork scheme in application for most of the work in Press shop no. 4 and some production lines in Press shop no. 3. In these areas, the production of heavy components on presses of high tonnage was predominant, and these were not considered to be good piecework jobs by operators. Before the introduction of the agreed daywork scheme in 1974, there was evidence of sabotage and other forms of direct action. In this context, management sought to establish a daywork system on the basis of which

they would get better co-operation from the shop-floor. The Company was looking for a more regular and steady flow of production.[27]

The agreement was reached on the basis of ~~existing piecework~~ bargaining standards, not the application of work study. In practice, the scheme meant that the operators were expected to produce to a target which would pay the equivalent of a piecework performance of 197 per cent. By all accounts, the root of the problem for the Company was that the basic standards which they agreed were too low from the beginning. This can be seen in the example of the main single component produced in 1979, a type of heavy clutch cover (part no. 48312). The maximum speed of the press was 900 cycles per hour. Under agreed daywork, operators had to produce 328 components per hour to make the 197 per cent performance (i.e. 166 components corresponded to 100R). When shift B returned to piecework in 1979, in a situation where management was initiating the change from a relatively weak bargaining position, the piecework standard was established at 240 components per hour. Hence the press operators had no problem in reaching the daywork production target.[28] Indeed it became obvious to all that the operators would not produce at a smooth and steady pace on the basis of this payment system. Such a spreading of effort would have required a very high degree of collective discipline. The actual practice consisted in speeding up during the early hours of the shift so that the daily

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27. The agreement was negotiated and signed by the general manager, who became managing director in 1976. He had been trained in the Glacier school of management for which a change from piecework to timework was a central tenet.

28. The agreement of April 1974 consisted of a sliding scale of five possible levels of production corresponding to as many levels of performance and remuneration. But the operators never had any problem in producing at the highest of these levels which corresponded to the 197 per cent performance quoted above.

production target could be reached long before the end of working time. At the time of observation in 1979-80, operators working on daywork in Press shop no. 4 regularly completed their daily production around lunch time.[29] By working intensely during the first part of the shift they were able to accumulate a substantial period of leisure at work. This phenomenon was widely known and discussed by all participants in the press shops, and also within the circle of senior managers.

Within the logic of this payment system there was no way that the operators would produce more than the agreed production target. What made the matter much worse for the Company, however, was that press operators found ways to produce less than the standard on a daily basis. This was the case when operators clocked off work for various reasons, hence proportionately reducing the daily standard of production. Management thought that going off piecework would put an end to the game of clocking off and on for any short stoppage of production. The 1974 agreement stated that:

> Payment will be calculated on the average rate of production achieved over the period of working on agreed day work up to the end of each shift. Clocking will be kept to a minimum and clocking off will only take place when a major stoppage of production is anticipated. Stoppages for box changes, issue of gloves, trips to the surgery for other than major treatment, etc., will not be considered as major stoppages.[30]

This degree of co-operation was not achieved, however, and the foremen were not firm and dedicated enough to enforce clocking discipline. Another paragraph of the agreement identified a list of reasons for stoppage that

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29. The press operators on day-shift worked from 7.30 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. and from 1.00 p.m. to 4.00 p.m. Those on night-shift worked from 8.00 p.m. to 1.30 a.m. and 2.00 a.m. to 6.30 a.m.

30. Agreement entitled 'Presswork Unit Pieceworker's Pay Proposals', April 1974, Issue 5, paragraph 2.4(i).

justified clocking off without any reduction in earnings.[31] In practice, there was so much pressure from the shop-floor on this matter that, some years ago, a section manager made a deal with the operators which became a custom and practice known as the '7 hours guarantee'. This meant that the operators would produce on the basis of the production target for seven hours (out of eight) and were then assured of one hour of waiting time with no loss of earnings. The peculiar rationale behind this understanding was that the operators would only go off the clock for major stoppages exceeding one hour per shift, thus reducing the inconvenience of clocking. As one would expect, it did not eliminate such a deep-rooted practice. During a dispute over 'excess clocking' in Press shop no. 4 in 1979, the managing director told the meeting: 'the present payment scheme within no. 4 Press Shop was the result of a bad agreement but the operators are turning it into a very bad agreement'.[32]

It became clear to management that they would have to withdraw from an agreement so damaging to productivity. In an internal document entitled 'no. 4 Press Shop Profitability', prepared for the managing director and other senior managers, the general manager for press-work wrote (October 1977):

> I also consider that a change of Shop Management could be a rather toothless gesture unless the real (. . .) in the woodpile has been exposed and corrected, i.e. the payment system/agreement which allows men to be paid at a rate higher than the flat rate areas without the obligation on the part of those men to work for a fair day's pay.

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31. These are: 'press breakdown not attributable to operator error; end of run; awaiting material or boxes; job stopped by inspection or supervision through no fault of the operator; accidents requiring medical attention'. ibid., article 2.4(iii).

32. 'Minutes of a meeting held on Monday, 19th February 1979', p. 1. When the managing director addressed all the employees of the factory in October 1979, he referred to the agreed daywork scheme as 'the worst mistake I ever did'.

In 1979, management succeeded in negotiating a return to piecework for one of the two rotating shifts (shift B). These workers agreed on a package of standards which were loose enough to justify a much higher level of effort in return for higher earnings. The other shift of the same section refused and voted to stay on daywork. During the fieldwork we could therefore observe two groups of employees on the same work process functioning at very different levels of effort under different payment systems.

The contrast was made sharper by the fact that those back on piecework did not enforce any form of collective output restriction. They were producing at a remarkably high level of effort, trying to make the most of the loose piecework standards. Over the first seven weeks of production under the piecework scheme (from 18 May 1979), the average piecework performance stood at 323, 313, 341, 318, 344, 361, and 339 per cent. While the press operators on shift B of Press shop no. 4 had received an average of £82.68 a week over the six-week period preceding the implementation of piecework, their wages were £110.21 on average over the following seven-week period (corresponding to the above piecework performance). In 1979, the operators on piecework in Press shop no. 4 were producing more than twice the amount of those on agreed daywork on the other shift. Indeed, often with some fiddling of the clock, it was not unusual for work groups to book a quantity corresponding to the maximum speed of the press.

But while the difference in output was exceptionally high, this was not reflected to the same extent in wages. The figures to which we had access revealed a good deal of variation in the differential between the weekly earnings of the two shifts. On most weeks, however, this differential fluctuated between £20 and £30, that is around 25 per cent

of wages. Many operators felt that the variable element of the payment system, which had been reduced in relative terms over the years, was not substantial enough to reflect the surplus of effort and production in their earnings. This may be one of the reasons why, in our last series of interviews (May 1980), managers complained that although pieceworkers in no. 4 were earning as much as they did before, their production was not as high as in the period immediately following the change. There was some fiddling, more pressure on effort control, and the problems of management control were recurring.

This sequence of events has shown once again that in a situation where the shop-floor had some control over the work process, neither the daywork nor the piecework schemes were sophisticated enough to motivate workers and ensure managerial control. In other words, neither direct control nor labour autonomy with control over output would allow management to get the level of effort they had in mind. Such a degree of worker control over the distribution of effort required considerable social organisation. Indeed, the very process by which workers were able to impose their own management of time on the employer is worth further attention. Two examples illustrate how the shop-floor organisation was able to institutionalise its control over effort and time.

The first concerns early finishing, or leisure at work. Once the operators had reached their standards, the well established practice was that they could stop working, leave the shop-floor and go 'upstairs' to take leisure and wait until the end of the shift. It was noted that such a period of leisure at work could be very substantial for those working on agreed daywork. As Evans (1980:75) reported,

> agreed daywork standards were 'loose' enough to encourage the operators to relax their own collective self-discipline. Operators could 'get their day in' by lunch-time, and the afternoons were given over to card-playing and other leisure activities.

Although the practice was most obvious under agreed daywork, where management had 'lost the battle', in the words of a section manager, it existed in varying degrees in all areas of the press shops. On most working days, within one hour of the end of the shift, there were few press operators to be found on the shop-floor. Of the pieceworkers, some had reached the ceiling, others had achieved their 'target' for the day. For many operators, the best deal of all was a mixture of agreed daywork and piecework jobs during the same shift.[33] They would, for instance, get ahead on a daywork job and then start working on a piecework job (often before being clocked on) so that they could earn a piecework bonus and still finish relatively early.

Although members of management never legitimised the practice of early finishing, they had to recognise its existence. By their action, however, production managers contributed to the institutionalisation of a type of behaviour they would otherwise classify as 'restrictive labour practices'. Hence, once press operators had made up their working day, the foremen could use neither their labour nor the presses to which they were assigned since operators were still clocked on the job during this period of leisure at work. However, it became a custom for management to take 'advantage' of this unusual situation by putting setters to work on these presses so that they could prepare the production lines for the beginning of the following shift. In a context where management was often short on its schedule of production, it made the best of this margin of discretion resulting from the practice of press operators finishing early. Similarly, one of the section managers explained that if he had a 'hot job' to be allocated in the

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33. A small minority of jobs done in Press shop no. 4 had always been produced on piecework. In Press shop no. 3, the two systems had coexisted since 1974, most of the jobs being produced on piecework.

afternoon, he would ask for the work group's co-operation so that they did not reach their daily production in the earlier part of the shift.[34] By making arrangements that acknowledged the practice of finishing early, management was contributing to institutionalised shop-floor control.

In the second example concerning overtime working, this process was pushed a step further. By custom and practice, overtime was distributed according to the principle of 'one in, all in'. This meant that if management wanted to run one or some of the production lines for a few additional hours, it had to offer overtime to everybody in the section. Although this rule originated from the sections, it was a fairly general practice at Firm B, most of all in the press shops. In the context of early finishing, the problem at some stage was to decide whether the operators would have to get back on their press for the period of overtime, or whether they could make up this overtime production within the standard hours, even before the period of leisure at work. Initially, management was adamant that press operators should return to their work station if they chose to work overtime, say from 4 p.m. to 5 p.m. At the time of our observations, however, management had given this up and press operators could, and in many cases did, complete their overtime production within standard hours. In Press shop no. 3, for instance, it was usual for the foreman to enquire whether the operators wished to work overtime at lunch time. With this information, he would attempt to work out how they could man the production lines in order to respect these choices and achieve the maximum amount of production. Hence, it was convenient to put those wanting

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34. Section manager, Press shop no. 3, 4 October 1979.

overtime together so they could reach their production standard, including overtime, not too late in the afternoon. Once again, however, they had to wait for the end of their overtime period before leaving the factory.

Obviously, such a practice illustrates the depth of worker control over effort and time or, it might be said, the extent to which management had capitulated. Why did management tolerate this practice? First, it would not necessarily be more efficient to have the production stopped for a couple of hours and then have some of the operators back on the shop-floor at 4 p.m. Management might lose, for instance, the 'advantage' of having the presses and the production lines set for the next shift. Some maintenance work might also have to be done. Moreover, when managers made a point of forcing the operators to come down to their work station for overtime, they realised that the operators were fed up and unwilling to produce with co-operation. Indeed, once they had been waiting for a while, many operators would simply refuse to start again. At times when the Company was trying to get more production by any means, management came to acknowledge and even institutionalise some working arrangements which, under different social relations, would be strongly opposed in the name of rationality and efficiency.

Before suggesting an explanation for this degree of control over effort and time exercised by press operators, it is appropriate to consider the other integral part of the effort bargain: the issue of wages. The high degree of control exercised by the press operators, and especially their collective pressure on the effort side of the wage-effort bargain, has been documented at length in this section. But to what extent was it achieved at the expense of comparatively lower wages?

From their control over the intensity and distribution of effort, the operators were able to limit the overall amount of effort and the creation of relative surplus value. What was the impact of this on weekly wages?

This question can be explored by reference to a series of data on the press operators' relative pay position within the factory, and in relation to other press operators in the Coventry labour market over the last decade. These data have been collected by the Coventry and District Engineering Employers' Association, and are similar to those analysed by William Brown in his studies on the impact of incomes policy on engineering wages (1976 and 1979). They comprise standard weekly wages, excluding overtime and shift premium, collected in October of each year.[35]

Table 7.1 on pay differentials shows that the press operators maintained a very high position in the internal wage structure in comparison with all occupational groups on a daywork payment system. Indeed, their weekly wages were closely comparable to those of the electricians over the decade, with a £6.30 gap in favour of the operators in 1979. They also kept their position within 10 per cent of the wages of the most skilled and strategic group in presswork production, the toolmakers. Finally, by the end of the decade they had consolidated their differential in relation to indirect labour, both semi-skilled (internal truck drivers) and labourers.

Table 7.2 shows that for most groups of manual workers (with the exception of labourers) Firm B was very high in the wages-league table

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35. The writer is very grateful to William Brown and Peter Nolan, of the ESRC Industrial Relations Research Unit, who gave access to this series of data. It covers seven occupational groups in 25 engineering factories, from 1971 to 1979. For a note on the statistical basis of these data, see Brown, 1976:47-9.

TABLE 7.1

WEEKLY WAGES (£) AND PAY DIFFERENTIALS[a] FOR FIVE OCCUPATIONAL GROUPS AT FIRM B, 1971-1979

	1971	1973	1975	1977	1978	1979
Press Operators	39.83 (100)	47.10 (100)	60.34 (100)	72.68 (100)	83.50 (100)	99.03 (100)
Toolroom Operators	44.84 (112.6)	49.50 (105.1)	61.05 (101.2)	80.32 (110.5)	87.50 (104.8)	106.16 (107.2)
Electricians	39.68 (99.6)	49.20 (104.4)	60.50 (100.3)	76.75 (105.6)	82.40 (98.7)	92.73 (93.6)
Internal Truck Drivers	34.33 (86.2)	41.19 (87.4)	51.87 (86.0)	66.59 (91.6)	70.70 (84.7)	79.24 (80.0)
Labourers	20.48 (51.4)	26.00 (55.2)	38.68 (64.1)	59.89 (82.4)	62.79 (75.2)	70.45 (71.1)

NOTE: [a]Differentials, in brackets, are calculated on the basis of the press operators' wages.

TABLE 7.2

POSITION IN WAGES-LEAGUE TABLE WITHIN THE COVENTRY ENGINEERING SECTOR FOR FOUR OCCUPATIONAL GROUPS, 1971-1979

	N[a]	1971	1973	1975	1977	1979
Press Operators	-	4/12	4/12	2/9	1/8	1/11
Toolroom Operators	17	2	14	15	5	9
Electricians	24	6	4	13	6	15
Labourers	19	16	17	17	-	12

NOTE: [a]N refers to the number of factories for which data are available on a given occupational group. In the case of press operators, this number was not constant over the years.

of the Coventry engineering sector in 1971 and 1972. Over the following years its relative position declined, and by 1979 most occupational groups were at a medium rank in the same wages table. The main exception to this trend is the group under study here, since the press operators were still receiving higher wages at Firm B than in any other factory in the Coventry labour market in 1977 and 1979 (Table 7.2). Considering that the bases for external comparison were 'in national terms . . . relatively high-paying establishments with long traditions of powerful shop-floor trade unionism' (Brown, 1976:28), it therefore appears that the press operators (Firm B) were not making more concessions on wages than on the other component of the effort bargain.

3.4 Towards an Explanation

Before discussing the determinants of job control at a more general level, it would be useful to identify the elements of an explanation of the press operators' control over effort documented here at length. Why did effort and working time escape from management control to such an extent in these shops? Discussion focuses on four institutional factors, placed in an historical perspective, and three aspects of the work process in the press shops which appear to be significant.

The first factor relates to the origin of the piecework scheme. First, the scheme, from its inception in the late sixties, was not based on systematic work study. Its technical basis was dubious and never won much credibility among the ranks of operators. Moreover, it was explained in Chapter 4 how press operators had resisted the implementation of this piecework system because it conflicted with the principle of mutuality. This was a major underlying cause of the labour relations crisis of the late sixties. It was a time when the strength and

confidence of the shop-floor organisation were at their highest and, by late 1969, the very basis of the piecework scheme was shaken by the press operators' resistance. From 1970 on, management was in retreat. While the Company was in neither the financial nor the market position to 'buy peace', management adopted a more defensive and conciliatory approach so that industrial strife could be reduced in the press shops. In this process, and in a context where production managers had to face short delivery targets and regular pressure from the main customers, they came to rely more and more on 'provisional standards' (i.e. 'one off' deals to get the work done) which also contributed to the decay of the payment system. Hence, over the decade, the fragile payment system was further eroded as a result of constant piecework bargaining and haggling.

This leads us to the second institutional factor, the shop-floor organisation. It is obvious that a high degree of collective control over effort depended very much on the development of a relatively robust shop-floor organisation, which invested much of its energy in hard bargaining over production standards and manning levels. To develop control over effort requires the social organisation necessary ro reduce division between workers. Although collectivism had declined considerably by the late seventies, it could still be observed at section level. Moreover, the factory organisation was still strong enough to mobilise and generate support if management tried to take on a particular section, at least in the press shops.

Thirdly, some attention has to be given to mismanagement in relation to the effort bargain in the press shops. The point is that the payment system had not only been broken by shop-floor pressure. At various stages, senior managers had been involved in negotiations which had serious implications for the effort bargain. Some steps were taken

which reflect either a lack of strategy or an incomplete understanding of the causes and implications of the shop-floor control over effort. Negotiation of agreed daywork may be a good case in point here, but other examples are also worth noting. In several cases during the 1970s, some negotiations conducted at divisional level resulted in a more or less general reduction of standard quantities for all the press shops. This was done, for instance, as part of the 1979 wage negotiations, when the piecework standards were reduced so that the overall wage increase of the press operators could correspond to the overall increase of 11 per cent within the factory. This is not a conventional way of proceeding, and it had the effect of further demoralising the work study engineers.

The logic of this payment system was to increase the conversion factor regularly in order to adjust piecework earnings to both internal and external labour markets (Brown, 1973:18-21). Surprisingly, however, the collective agreements show that the conversion factor in application before 1974 remained unchanged until 1979. Instead, most of the progress in weekly wages over the period was the result of increases in the 'make-up factor', that is, the non-variable component of press operators' wages. This was exacerbated when Phases 1 and 2 of national incomes policy were consolidated in the make-up factor as part of the 1978 agreement. Indeed, the piecework base rate was increased from £19.53 to £40.13 a week as a result of this agreement. Such a sharp diminution of variable piecework earnings had the effect of making less direct the relation between effort and wages, which is the key if piecework is to be a major incentive. This became obvious to top management and the 1979 collective agreement stated 'that successive years of adding increases for pieceworkers onto the make-up (fixed)

element has acted as a disincentive to such employees and requires correction'.[36]

A fourth institutional factor explaining the erosion of management control over effort was the weakness and lack of dedication of shop-floor management in the determination and enforcement of the effort bargain. For instance, the foremen did not give any support to the work study engineers at the time of work study and piecework bargaining. 'We try to keep away from it', one of them stressed in formal interview.[37] Moreover, foremen were particularly lenient on time control, in a work process where there was plenty of room for ingenious workers to 'beat the system'. The very high proportion of down time provides evidence for this. All the work study men we talked to complained about the carelessness of foremen. They blamed them for not knowing all the intricacies of the peculiar payment system in operation in this factory. Our analysis would rather suggest that such a pattern of indulgence and leniency corresponds to rational behaviour to be understood in studying the strategic position of the foremen whose influence was weakened as a result of the reform (Chapter 5).

We now turn our attention to structural factors, looking back briefly to some of the main characteristics of the work process which have all been considered at some stage in the above analysis. The question of the material basis of job control will develop into a general argument of this dissertation. At this stage, what is intended is to stress the fact that the work process in the press shops was intrinsically very

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36. 'Hourly Paid Wage Settlement, 1979', article 3.1.

37. Interview with a foreman of Press shop no. 3, 10 October 1979.

difficult to manage.

The first of these relevant aspects of the work process is the method of production. Presswork production at Firm B was synonymous with batch production. This involved more or less frequent reorganisations of production lines, with consequent changes in manning, composition of the work groups, and production standards. Moreover, it was explained earlier that, partly as a result of unfortunate corporate decisions, the Company's share of the presswork market became highly concentrated on small and medium batches. A large number of short runs meant that the propensity for shop-floor bargaining was very high. Competition in the product market and the Company's dependence upon a small number of large component manufacturers generated some pressure at the point of production which the press operators were often able to exploit for short-term gains. Hence the multiplication of inflationary 'provisional standards' referred to above.

Secondly, a good deal of emphasis has been put on the type of machinery in operation in the press shops. All of these presses were non-automatic machines and, even on production lines, an operator had to press a button on every press for every single component. This created a major gap between the optimal level of production from a technical viewpoint and a socially acceptable level of output, i.e. what is realistic under a given balance of power and social structure. It is also suggested that this operator control over the work pace became the starting point for the build-up of more general control over effort.

A third technical condition of production which appears to be significant in studying control over effort in the press shops is the integration between work stations. Most of the work in Press shops no. 3 and no. 4 was produced on linked work stations, the presses being joined

by a series of conveyor belts. This set the material basis for a collective approach on the part of the workers on issues such as piece-work bargaining and the determination of the level of effort (e.g. output restriction). Integration between work stations also helped to develop the operators' cohesiveness in their relation to shop-floor management generally. This factor was particularly important in a context where operators were producing small batches, which made for regular changes in the composition of the work groups, on a technology which gave them a good grasp of the immediate intensity of effort. In this specific combination of techniques, the integration between jobs was an important factor in the development of social organisation in the press shops. This is crucial since without this type of shop-floor organisation a comparable work process might have produced a very different pattern of control. Indeed, this was the case at the other engineering firm under study in this research.

The explanation developed here is that this particular combination of technical conditions of production had an impact on the development of the pattern of control observed in the press shops. It represented a rather unfavourable ground for management to develop a functional payment system and control over effort. Management, which had shown other signs of weakness, had to perform on terrain (the work process) and with reference to circumstances (the product market) which placed them at a disadvantage.

4. CONCLUSION

The empirical material presented in this chapter contributes in many ways to the development of the general argument of the dissertation and many of the issues will be discussed in the general conclusions of

the thesis. Following the above explanation of the press operator type of job control, we intend to discuss here at a more general level the factors which may account for the very different degrees of job control in the two firms under study.

The distinction between the different patterns of control in the factories studied, which was developed in Chapter 6, now appears more pronounced. For instance, while both the tinsmiths and the press operators were reported to have very high degrees of control over effort, there were significant differences in the origin and enforcement of these collective controls. But it is principally on the sharp contrast between the patterns of control of the two main groups of semi-skilled production workers that attention will focus here. What are the main lines of explanation for this much lesser degree of control over effort in the machine shops (Firm A) as compared with the press shops?

The process of institutionalisation of labour relations studied in Chapter 4 is comparable in the two firms. The structures of labour relations were roughly similar at the time of observation. Hence the primary cause of the different patterns of control could not lie in the institutional framework. It remains possible, however, that the same reform might have set different processes in action in the two workplaces, thus maintaining or even exacerbating the difference between them.

In studying control over effort in this chapter, a good deal of attention was given to the various payment systems applied in the different workshops. However, our empirical material suggests that the payment system does not represent an explanatory factor of the different patterns of control, but that it usually reinforced the position of either management or labour, depending on the balance of power on the shop-floor.

Hence, it was not an independent variable but an element which contributed to strengthening the position of the side having most control over the details of the work process. This would help to explain why a payment system introduced as an element of management control might be turned against management when the shop-floor developed control over many aspects of their work. This level of analysis is also consistent with the fact that similar payment systems are often compatible with sharply different patterns of control in different factories.

Hence the most obvious explanation of the different patterns of control over effort is the strength of the respective shop-floor organisations. As was seen earlier, workers at Firm B had a much longer history of militant action and the structure of their organisation was better suited to job control. The evidence presented in Chapters 6 and 7 in fact shows that these factors favoured a more collective response to many facets of labour utilisation. What is more problematic, however, is that the strength of the workers' organisation at Firm B was located at the section level, with much less strategy and organisation developed at factory level. This issue will be discussed in the concluding chapter. The complex question of the reasons for the different characters of these two workers' organisations was studied in the conclusion of Chapter 3. We stressed the tradition of craft control and militancy at Firm B, as well as the differences in the composition of the labour force and the pattern of shop-floor representation. In addition to these factors, it has been suggested in this chapter that some of the characteristics of the work process contributed to fostering social organisation in the press shops and not in the machine shops.

The emphasis placed on productive activities and workers' organisation and resistance in this dissertation should not detract from

the fact that management structure and strategies obviously had a strong influence on the degree of job control. Firm A's management had relatively firm control over effort. A very small network of senior managers (including the managing director and the personnel director) were in command, and they kept in touch with day-to-day production, very much in the tradition of family-owned businesses. They could also count on a sophisticated production control system, permitting monitoring of the work process without too much direct supervision. Following the intervention of the CIR, they adopted a broad reformist approach to labour relations, with much more recognition and involvement of the shop stewards. However, this pluralist approach was very much a minority position within the ranks of senior management (Ogden, 1981:35-6; Purcell, 1981:31). Such an approach had reduced overt manifestations of conflict, but line managers did not like the idea of having to consult shop stewards and justify their decisions on 'production matters'. The approach 'was not producing the results that line management wanted to see'.[38] With the increasing decline of the engineering industry, the pressure for labour productivity became stronger and the personnel director had to 'reflect consensus within management' and retreat to a more 'old-fashioned style of management'.[39] This shift in managerial strategy, from approximately late 1978, meant a stricter attitude towards labour resistance and restrictive labour practices and less 'talking' with the shop stewards. From then on, labour productivity was a major theme and it involved a substantial reduction in the size of the labour force in the course of 1979.

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38. Formal interview with the personnel director, 21 December 1978.

39. ibid.

In comparison, some appreciable differences were observed in the structure and strategies of management at Firm B. For one thing, this was a management-controlled company, owned by a large engineering group. The top managers in command during the seventies were very imaginative, particularly in their relations with labour. However, their influence was mediated by as many as four layers of management between the managing director and the 830 manual workers. Many members of shop-floor management had been promoted because of their technical abilities and had little skill in managing people. After the period of confrontation of the late sixties, there was little trust between lower levels of management (including foremen) and the workers. Shop-floor managers were on the defensive, and the philosophy of participation and shop steward involvement advocated by the management team who took office in 1970 had the effect of demoralising them even further. Shop-floor managers had a small role to play in this reform, and they certainly felt that it weakened their position. It is felt that this relative weakness of management at the level of production was a contributory factor to the development and persistence of a higher degree of job control at Firm B.

There were genuine differences in the managerial strategies of these two firms. But these choices were also made within different constraints. Hence, there were strong market pressures in the two cases, although the financial position of Firm B was more critical. Shop-floor resistance was also much more pervasive in the latter firm, and this had a dominant influence on management behaviour and strategies. Finally, it has been emphasised in this chapter that the technical conditions of production facilitated the emergence of worker control over effort in the press shops, to a degree not even comparable to the situation observed

in the machine shops. It would be appropriate to further develop this argument on the material basis of job control.

One characteristic of the work process studied in this chapter was the decomposition of labour. In fact, the distinction between types of task was conceived and applied much more strictly in the press shops than in the machine shops, and this led to a complex network of demarcation rules in the former case. In section 3, we have tried to show that the production of small batches on non-automatic machines and integrated work stations set the material basis for the substantial degree of control exercised by press operators over many aspects of the utilisation of their labour. Although the two factories concerned were producing batches of components, the combination of the many aspects of the work process was more favourable to worker control in the press shops. Of course, these technical conditions were no more than resources (or potential advantages) which had to be developed by a cohesive shop-floor organisation to produce the observed results. Hence, while control over the immediate intensity of effort depended very much on technical conditions, control over the distribution of effort over the shift required a high degree of social organisation. It should be noted, however, that in the development of the necessary shop-floor organisation the work process did not have a neutral effect. Some conditions, and particularly the decomposition of labour and the integration between work stations, had a positive influence on the development of a stronger shop-floor organisation at Firm B.

Clearly, it is not argued here that the nature of the work process determines the pattern of control, but rather that the structural variables which condition strategies and behaviour on both sides must be analysed. It is suggested that the work process sets the material

basis for control over labour utilisation. This potential influence, however, which is by no means the only possible one, may or may not materialise depending on the social structure and organisation prevailing in a given workplace. Similarly, the specific nature of the shop-floor organisation is probably the most crucial factor. As a result, giving proper consideration to the productive activities underlying labour relations does not represent a new version of technical determinism. Nevertheless, rejecting technical determinism should not lead to a position by which the work process is considered as <u>neutral</u> in the struggle for control on the shop-floor.

CHAPTER 8

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

Although many concepts and analytical distinctions have been introduced throughout this dissertation, the thesis so far remains largely descriptive and empirical. The time has now come to pull the various parts of the argument together. This exercise should lead to an analysis which will have some implications for policy and theory, in addition to furnishing an understanding of labour relations in two engineering firms.

The conclusion is written in three sections corresponding to the phases of our argument. In order to make the main argument of the dissertation more explicit, the first section presents in a more coherent fashion the specificity and significance of our analytical framework for the study of labour control. Many of the implications of such an approach are considered in Section 2, which deals with the impact of the reform of workplace labour relations on job control. It is argued that the results of institutionalisation are contradictory, and that worker controls over labour utilisation resist changes introduced in the structure of labour relations. However, there are objective limits to the development of job control which cannot be ignored. The final section examines the vulnerability of job control in a context where a sectional type of worker resistance affects the capitalist enterprise negatively at a very sensitive point in a period of economic recession.

1. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS ON THE ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

In Chapter 1 the concept of work process was identified as the starting-point of the study of control over labour utilisation. Labour relations were to be considered as a derivative function in reference to

the primary function of the enterprise, which is production. In this study these more or less institutionalised relations between managers, workers and trade unions have not been studied as an autonomous sphere of relations. They have been analysed with reference to the activities and immediate relations developing at the point and at the time of production. Given this perspective, it was necessary to describe in some detail the nature and contours of the work processes in the factories studied (Chapter 2). The following chapters focused mainly on the institutions of labour relations and their reform. From an operational definition of the concept of work process, it was then possible to refer in a specific way to the essential characteristics of the different production activities and proceed to an empirical study of job control (Chapters 6 and 7). The presentation of a good deal of evidence led to the development of the argument on the material basis of job control, a central theme of the thesis.

The analytical framework of this dissertation may be labelled materialist in that it locates the material basis of the relationship between capital and labour in the work process. Production activities are conceived as an infrastructure conditioning the relationships between individuals, groups and institutions in the workplace. This develops into a dichotomous framework for the study of labour relations, in which the basis of conflict is found in the transformation of labour power in the work process. Control over the way labour power is utilised, the central problem studied here, is considered to be a strategic issue. Detailed study of the specific conditions of labour utilisation and of the whole structure of control which has developed in relation to it are the other characteristic features of this approach to

labour relations. In spite of such an emphasis on structural forces, the evolution of the processes of control in the two firms was discussed in considerable detail throughout the dissertation. Following Edwards and Scullion, this writer takes the view that '"action" and "structure" are intimately related, with each continuously affecting the other' (1982a:277; also Edwards, 1983:51).[1] On the one hand, the strategies and actions of the participants and the whole social process which arises are very much influenced by the social structure. On the other hand, this structure develops only as a result, in specific historical conditions, of individual and collective actions, or in other words as a result of the process of control over the years. From this viewpoint, a study of the social structure does not make sense without a study of action and social processes. Accordingly, by looking at the material forces as well as at the social organisation and processes, it was possible to go some way towards understanding the development of particular patterns of control.

The present study also makes a more specific contribution. It has tried to show how the working of the institutional framework for labour relations, as well as the way the process of control over work relations develops, are conditioned to some extent by production constraints and the need, more generally, for management to control the work process. In doing so, this research has pointed out some of the ways to link two major trends in the literature: the institutional approach to the study of labour relations and the more recent discussion on the labour process. Although these two areas of research have

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1. The writer would like to make explicit the influence of these two publications on the understanding of many facets of the approach discussed in this section.

expanded in Britain over the last decade, with few exceptions they have followed different routes. Indeed, the two trends are even more strongly entrenched in North America, both 'sides' ignoring each other in an obvious demonstration of intellectual parochialism (Hyman, 1982).

It is important to make more explicit the possible contribution of a materialist approach to the study of workplace labour relations. Within the limits of this research, such a position has implications for at least four different levels of analysis. First, at the most general level, we have tried to show that there is no clear separation between productive and institutional relations, the former being the infrastructure on which labour relations develop. It was possible to illustrate this in many ways in rendering the concept of the work process operational. Secondly, although the focus of this research is on control and not conflict, this analytical framework would tend to consider these concepts closely associated. In the same way as Edwards and Scullion (who said a great deal about control in their study of conflict), we made use of some of the tools of Marxist theories on the labour process which 'locate conflict in a struggle between workers and employers for control over the terms on which labour power is translated into effort' (1982a:257).

At a third level of analysis, this dissertation puts a good deal of emphasis on the relation between the technical conditions of production and the pattern of control. We have tried to show in Chapter 7 that the work process is not a neutral element in the struggle for control over labour utilisation; it sets the material basis for a specific pattern of control. It was stressed, however, that the work process does not determine the pattern of control. Whatever the technical labour process may be, management is able to impose control in some workplaces and not in others. Of course, what is crucial is the

structure and pattern of management control over the work process and not the technical labour process in itself. If one is studying job control, or control over the way labour power is utilised in the work process, however, the analysis must go deeper in looking at the very determinants of control. In this respect, it is felt that a materialist analysis should gain a great deal in gauging the actual importance of the technical labour process: one of the major contributing factors in the development of control. Hence we arrive at the proposition documented here, that a particular combination of technical conditions of production contributed to the emergence and protection of a substantial degree of job control in one of the factories studied.

At a fourth level of analysis, it is possible to go one step further. The proposition which is now put forward is that worker control over the work process generates the resources for a broader range of intermediary sanctions available to the workforce. While the nature of the work process has a significant influence on job control, it also appears that the degree of job control has, in turn, a positive relation with the potential for worker resistance. As a general rule, the more discretion workers have over the nature of work and the level of effort, the more dependent management becomes upon their co-operation. Furthermore, the very impact of sanctions, such as work-to-rule or a refusal to perform the complete job description, tends to vary with the degree of job control. The case of the toolmakers at Firm B, discussed in Chapter 7, illustrates this point. Their craft control, consolidated by rigid demarcation lines, gave them the necessary resources to disrupt production with little cost to themselves. Of course, the deployment of sanctions requires social organisation. The point is, however, that job control and social organisation are likely to be found

in the same workplace, since they are closely and positively related.

This relationship, which is called here the instrumentality of job control, may take effect in two opposite ways. On the one hand, there appears to be a threshold of worker control below which any form of individual or collective resistance is risky. This was the case in the clothing factories studied by Edwards and Scullion. On the other hand, we have observed a generating effect, by which greater control over labour utilisation develops greater potential for worker resistance. This can be seen in the case of the press operators. This process helps to explain the interdependence between the different forms of job control and, more importantly, the main reason why its development is such a recurring process.

2. THE IMPACT OF INSTITUTIONAL REFORM ON JOB CONTROL

The Donovan Commission held the view that major dysfunctions in the structure of labour relations hindered the development of a rational and coherent mode of job regulation and resulted in 'disorder in factory and workshop relations' (1968:40). Accordingly, its programme for reform centred on the development of an institutional framework for conducting labour relations in the workplace. Although the frequency of unofficial strikes received a good deal of attention in the press and part of the literature, it would appear that the advocates of structural reform were deeply concerned with the lack of management control over labour utilisation. To many observers, a primary concern in the reformist strategy was to give management the tools to fight restrictive labour practices in bargaining at the workplace. This was also the meaning of the movement for productivity bargaining and measured daywork.

At Firm A and Firm B, there is no doubt that institutional reform has been highly successful in reducing the manifestation of conflict (the strike problem), in permitting the introduction of more coherent payment systems (the wage drift and pay problem), and in broadening the scope of fringe benefits. However, the impact is much more problematic on the crucial issue of job control and restrictive labour practices. Here the results appear to be contradictory. The bulk of empirical material concerning Firm A leads to the conclusion that in factories where the scope and degree of job control were limited prior to the reform, and where the shop-floor organisation was relatively weak, the institutionalisation of labour relations helped management to confine job control within narrow limits. This model of labour relations had a significant influence in preventing the development of job control, and it strongly contributed to reinforcing management control over labour utilisation at a higher level in the organisation. At Firm B, in contrast, where job control was solidly established by the late sixties, the reform did not help management to reduce job control significantly, but rather contributed to stabilising it. True, the limits of job control have been circumscribed, and some may argue that it prevented management control from deteriorating further. But once workers had established some discretion on many aspects of the deployment of labour, job demarcation, manning levels and the effort bargain, the possibilities for job control were rather saturated within existing social relations of production.

In fact, some evidence presented in Chapter 7 would indicate that worker control had become institutionalised in this factory. On the one hand, this means that job control did not depend any longer on shop-floor struggle and militant action, but became part of the shop-floor

culture. 'Vested rights' were protected by the shop steward organisation, but the conflictual character of day-to-day relations had been relaxed. On the other hand, this also implies that short of a comprehensive offensive by management, which might be stimulated by external pressures, it would be very difficult for managers to regain control over labour utilisation.

Besides giving very different results in different factories, there are other ways in which the results of institutional reform are contradictory. It would seem that its effects were least impressive in coping with the problem which concerned structural reformers the most, that is the question of the 'efficient use of manpower' (Donovan Report, 1968: Chapter VI). Moreover, our empirical evidence corresponds with Terry's analysis that the impact of the reform was the least impressive in companies which most badly needed it. He observed that

> in general it would appear that programmes for reform were least likely to satisfy managerial expectations in companies which already had strong shopfloor organisation and which were, according to the argument developed here about the concerns of management and the state, those most in need of reform. By contrast the sectors where it would seem to have had the most dramatic impact (in terms of changes over the decade) are those with only limited, if any, traditions of shopfloor organisation. (1983:87)

This trend suggests that the phase at which the process of institutionalisation occurs may be decisive. Clearly, to prevent the development of job control and to eradicate it once it has developed are two different matters. In engineering firms with long-established shop-floor controls, managers could hardly have regained the ground already lost without a dramatic shift in the balance of power at the level of production. Such a course of action would have involved a frontal assault against the shop-floor organisations as well as, in most cases, reorganisation within management. It appears, however, that the

economic recession recently had the effect of forcing just such new work relations, and in a way which is not less exceptional. By contrast, in the factories where management control had never been eroded to a comparable extent, the new institutional framework may have set the trend for an American type of management control over labour utilisation, even without these exceptional external pressures.

The observed results of labour relations reform seem to be typical in another way. In their recent review of labour relations in the private sector since Donovan, Sisson and Brown (1983:137) concluded

> that there have been considerable changes in the conduct of bargaining over market relations, but that there has been surprisingly little change so far as managerial relations are concerned. In particular, the informality which characterised much of the bargaining in the 1960s continues to be a dominant feature twenty years later.

The dynamics accounting for the persistence of informality were well explained by Terry (1977) and many of their facets have been considered in this thesis. However, the phenomenon through which structural reform had strong effects on market relations and little on managerial relations requires further exploration. Some would argue that there is no logical reason for the phenomenon discussed here and that managerial problems related to labour utilisation are simply more difficult to tackle. There is at least one way, however, in which institutional reform may have consolidated job control. The contemporary form of job control (that of non-craft workers) in the engineering industry developed in the context of weak management control systems, where managers were not assuming real subordination of labour to its full extent and were dependent upon traditional piecework schemes. In a recent paper, Lewchuk (1983:104) argued that British motor car employers rejected direct control and Fordism as a viable strategy in the first quarter of the century 'because it required a degree of managerial control which

seemed incongruous with what management had been able to achieve during the war'. His explanation was that in a context in which they did not feel in full command of production, employers were largely dependent on payment by results as a way to attenuate conflict between capital and labour. Hyman and Elger (1981) also located such a type of 'unscientific management' within an historical perspective. In this sense, job control may be seen as the other face of a specific type of management: the delegation of control at work. From such a situation, the transfer of direct control of the labour process to management, through a strategy of either joint or unilateral regulation, required the elaboration of an information and control system within management. Indeed, regaining control necessitated shifting the equilibrium within management as well as between management and labour. Such a major restructuring was unlikely to happen except in response to a serious crisis.

In most workplaces, too little consideration was given to these defects within management structure and organisation. The first point is that, as noted earlier, many production managers were suspicious from the beginning about pluralism and the nature of labour relations reform, notably about the greater role given to the shop stewards. With poor economic performance in engineering, and eventually the wider recession, senior production managers were to impose more firmly their natural predominance in the balance of power within management.

Secondly, it is well established in the literature that reform had the effect of weakening the influence of foremen and shop-floor managers. Although in many engineering factories this level of management was not really in full command of operations before the reform, there was a need to fill the gap created within the management structure as a result of their further isolation from the process of control. For

example, at Firm A senior managers established a management control system and made sure they were in control of the many facets of production; this was not observable at Firm B. Therefore it seems logical to suggest that in many workplaces the workers' position in the balance of power at the shop-floor level may have improved as a result of labour relations reform. It is important to stress that the shop-floor remains the level of action which is most crucial to the development of job control.[2]

Procedural arrangements such as those discussed in this dissertation are not <u>in themselves</u> to the advantage of one side or the other. It all depends on the balance of power at a given level. In view of the above discussion on management, as well as the recurring nature of job control, it is not surprising that job control may have flourished under an institutional framework designed to reinforce management's position at a more central level. Even within the confines of the individual factory, the question of the complementarity between different levels of control must be assessed properly by management and labour if their strategies are to be successful.

From a different viewpoint, one also has to consider that contrary to the 'problems' of unofficial strikes and wage drift, restrictive labour practices were directly linked to the work process. The way labour power is utilised is very specific, and also quite conditioned by production constraints. Moreover, contrary to craft control, contemporary job control (such as that of press operators) was

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2. Michael Terry's discussion on the 'tactical significance of the shopfloor' is relevant here (1977:85-7).

highly dependent upon worker organisation at the shop-floor. It was not built upon intrinsic characteristics of the jobs, which were in fact semi-skilled or unskilled, nor was it spontaneous. It had to be organised on the principle of the shop steward system. Hence job control was strongly related to the strength of a specific shop steward and shop-floor organisation. In the case of Firm B, for instance, the pattern of shop steward representation constituted an appropriate adaptation to the contours of the work process, a model favourable to job control. To cope with restrictive labour practices, managerial strategies would have had to be sophisticated enough to take account of the specific character and material basis of job control, and contribute also to the institutionalisation of a particular type of shop-floor organisation.

Because of the material and organisational forces discussed here, a coherent structure of labour relations could not help management to regain control over labour utilisation in the same way as it regulated unofficial strikes and fragmented pay bargaining. With the new institutional arrangements, it was possible to develop disputes procedures and internal wage structures which helped to take some of the pressure off the level of production and displace the conflictual relationship towards a higher level in the hierarchy. As far as job control is concerned, it should be seen as an organised response to specific conditions of production. Indeed, it was so intimately related to the result of shop-floor cohesiveness and militancy that there was a strong resistance by workers to concessions regarding discretion on such matters. It would appear, therefore, that the analysis of the Donovan Commission put too much emphasis on the institutions of collective bargaining and too little on the fact that job control was rooted in an adaptation to specific

production processes by a particular type of shop-floor organisation. The weakness of this analysis was to exaggerate the autonomy of labour relations and hence overestimate the potential of structural reform.

The derivative nature of labour relations was illustrated by the case of Firm B where industrial relations reform had fostered an appeasement of open conflict without setting the conditions for the levels of production expected by the Company. Production and labour managers, more and more aware of this situation, were openly questioning the relationship between 'good industrial relations' and productivity. The problem was that, under the appearance of relative industrial peace, weak management control over the labour process had detrimental effects on productivity. Hence in spite of a relatively good performance there existed a pattern of control plainly unacceptable to the Company. Indeed, a major re-organisation of production was to come, and this should have had obvious effects on work relations. The point is that favourable labour relations is not an end in itself; the performance of a given structure of labour relations is likely to be assessed with reference to the criteria of productivity and profitability. The important work by Purcell on the impact of the reform on the process of industrial relations also provides evidence of this. Hence, in the two cases where a high degree of 'cooperative bargaining' was achieved, at least for a while, as a result of the reform,

> the high-trust pattern was short-lived. In one firm rapidly deteriorating product market and profitability led senior group management to take unilateral action, which re-opened the confrontation with the unions. The other plant was closed down, despite the dramatic improvements, when rapid technical change and market decline combined to force a major rationalisation in the industry. (Purcell, 1981:245)

Considering the contradictory results of Firm A and Firm B, as well as other sources, it was suggested above that the phase at which institutional changes intervened had a good deal of influence on the

impact of reform on the process of control. The timing of the change also deserves careful attention when comparing structures of labour relations at a national or international level. The role of a particular type of institutional framework in preserving managerial prerogatives and hindering the emergence of job control in the first place cannot necessarily be repeated in permitting the employers to regain the control they had lost prior to the structural changes. Hence, in comparison with the experience of the United States and Canada, the institutionalisation of workplace labour relations came at a much later stage in Great Britain. This appears to be a major source of persistent contrasts between the two patterns of labour relations. Burawoy (1979: 189) addresses the question in these terms:

> Why should the experience of the United States be different from that of Great Britain, where there continues to be a strong shop-steward movement and a militant rank and file? In similar industries, workers in Britain have managed to retain greater control over the shop floor than in the United States. . . . One possible answer lies in the relative timing of unionization and mechanization. In Great Britain, unions had established themselves prior to the twentieth-century thrust toward mechanization, whereas the reverse is true for the United States. Thus, at the time of their formation, industrial unions in the United States had to take expropriation of control over the labor process as a fait accompli, whereas, in Britain, industrial unionism appeared earlier, was able to resist such expropriation, and in this way laid the basis for a more militant trade-union movement.

While our analysis is consistent with Burawoy's argument, we would also add that, besides 'the relative timing of unionization and mechanization', the late institutionalisation of workplace labour relations is a major explanatory factor of the higher degree of job control in Britain.[3]

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3. Burawoy does not appear to be very familiar with structural changes in British labour relations. He only notes that 'more recently, large British corporations have been attempting to move toward more American patterns of organizing work, the internal labor market, and the internal state' (1979:189). His only reference on this matter is Nichols and Beynon, Living with Capitalism (1977).

Indeed, while there is a longer tradition of unionism in British work-places, it is also true that, in contrast, the development of a comprehensive structure to channel this pressure from the shop-floor came at a much later stage. A formal model of labour relations at plant level had developed at a relatively early stage in North America, and it was concomitant with the expansion of industrial unionism. In contrast, the movement of structural reform studied in this dissertation came after, and indeed constituted a reaction to, the 'challenge from below'.

3. THE VULNERABILITY OF JOB CONTROL

By national and international comparison, the scope and degree of control imposed by the engineering workers observed in this research are considerable. In one of the two firms under study, the challenge to management control over labour utilisation was substantial. By placing some emphasis on the most sophisticated forms of job control observed during the fieldwork, however, the dissertation may give the impression of an overwhelming power exercised by the shop-floor. This would not reflect accurately the balance of power in these factories; there are objective limits to the development of worker control. Returning to the Webbian distinction between the three types of decisions which 'make up industrial administration', namely 'the decision as to what shall be produced', the method of production and the working conditions (1897:818), it may be noted that workers have progressively extended their influence to many of the conditions of utilisation of their labour power. This progress was quite widespread in countries such as Britain, and was supported by legislation as well as by the type of labour relations structure studied here. In contrast, workers' incursions into decisions concerning 'the manner in which the production shall take place', the second category of decisions, were limited and

most variable. They were limited because they were always imposed from a defensive position, management having the initiative in the relationship of subordination. They may be interpreted as exceptions to the general rule by which management is in command of the work process. Accordingly, they are always open to pressures from management circles or market forces. It follows that, outside the craft tradition, the scope and degree of job controls are quite variable between workplaces. This research adds to the evidence of sharp contrasts, even within the British engineering industry. Finally, one should not underestimate the importance of the fact that in capitalist enterprises workers have only the slightest direct influence on the third type of decisions: economic policies of the firm. In the context of this research, this refers not only to issues such as planning and investment, but also to recovery plans and programmes for restructuring production.

The bulk of empirical evidence on Firm B may be interpreted as an illustration of the resistance and pervasiveness of job control in a poor economic context. Indeed, it is argued that labour relations reform failed to undermine job control and even generated contradictory forces which contributed to institutionalising it. With the appearance of industrial peace, large groups of manual workers still controlled many strategic aspects of the deployment of labour and the intensity and distribution of effort by the end of our fieldwork in May 1980. But this is only one part of the story. While job control was quite resistant to internal pressures, it proved to be vulnerable to external ones.

While workers were resisting management attempts to dilute job control, the very basis of their organisation was being eroded. Over a period of fifteen years, the total labour force at Firm B had been reduced by approximately 900, down to 1,250 in August 1979. There has been a gradual decline in the size of the workforce, with several years

of significant redundancies. With the deepening of the recession, market and financial pressures intensified and the parent group was no longer a safeguard against more substantial reductions in the number of both manual and white collar employees. Management had presented a programme for restructuring production when the Company was sold in August 1980. But the new management team implemented an even more important reorganisation of production, resulting in massive redundancies over the following year.[4] Much more than labour relations reforms, redundancies and major reorganisations of production are the ultimate threat to job control. Indeed, such a drastic end to the employment relationship for a large proportion of the workforce cannot occur without major changes in labour utilisation. This illustrates once again the contradictory nature of the employment relationship, in the sense that workers can only resist subordination to the extent that their link of structural interdependence with the company is reproduced, which is possible only if at least a minimum rate of profit is maintained.

Such a course is also likely to have other implications for job control by creating a further source of division between workers and by affecting their potential for resistance. It was observed at Firm A that the shop-floor had relaxed the relative control they had on manning levels when, for the first time in the seventies, the manual workforce was significantly reduced in 1979. At Firm B, which is the main point of reference here, we came across some instances where particular sections gave their consent to major compromises in order to save their jobs. But this was by no means the general picture, even in early 1980. The

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4. In a rather optimistic assessment of performance under this new management, it was reported in the local newspaper that 'during the past 12 months overheads have been cut back ruthlessly. The workforce of 1,200 has been almost halved, and the firm's own transport department closed down.' C. Lewis in Coventry Evening Telegraph, Business Life, 7 September 1981.

extent to which redundancies, and the recession more generally, have shaken the basis of job control in this factory since then remains an open question. But considering more recent information regarding the introduction of automatic presses in the Presswork division, as well as protracted periods of short-time working, it would be surprising if the pattern of control had not been affected, as in many other workplaces.

Indeed, this type of worker control over many aspects of the work process is likely to be vulnerable to market pressures, basically because it is at variance with dominant social relations of production. Job control may be vulnerable to the extent that it creates serious problems for management and that workplace unionism cannot stimulate the measures of consciousness and organisation which are necessary to counter an eventual challenge from the employer. These are the themes explored in the final pages of the dissertation.

A major principle of existing social relations of production is that the employer co-ordinates and controls the transformation of labour power in the work process. Control over the labour process is the foremost management function in the workplace. However, the real management objective is not to maximise control but to develop the pattern of control most conducive, given a specific context and social relations, to the optimal utilisation of labour power in the production of profit. Many writers hold the view that the type of job control discussed here has had a negative effect on labour productivity and profitability in Britain. Kilpatrick and Lawson (1980), for example, argued that the highly decentralised structure of collective bargaining and 'the strength of job-based worker organisation' has been a primary cause of industrial decline in the UK. Hyman and Elger, along with other contributors of the British Left, replied that job control had been 'a secondary rather

than a primary factor' (1981:145) of these structural problems. In a recent paper, Nichols (1983) offered a positive contribution to the understanding of this problem of the effect of job control on labour productivity, which is now discussed more openly.

For our purpose, it is relevant to address the problem of control at a more micro level. To what extent is job control detrimental to the achievement of management objectives with regard to profitability? More simply, is job control a major problem for management? While it has long been assumed that job controls had adverse effects on management objectives, recent research shows this need not necessarily be the case. The problem of control is more complex; as Hyman and Elger (1981:116) argued,

> job controls could not simply be regarded as the evidence or product of anti-capitalist struggle. Frequently they operated within limits acceptable to employers, and could often be viewed as elements in an accommodation which did not obstruct, and might even facilitate the production and realisation of surplus value.

In fact, an important body of literature has shown that direct control is only one of the forms of management control in modern industry, and by no means the most rational and profitable one in all circumstances (Friedman, 1977; R.C. Edwards, 1979). This led Terry (1983:74) to observe that 'treating job control as a "zero-sum" phenomenon, with a gain for workers representing a corresponding loss for management, is over simple. "Worker control" and its agents can further or hinder management aims.'

A distinction which is useful to the understanding of this phenomenon is that suggested by Hyman and Elger (1981:117), and developed by P.K. Edwards (1983:20-22), between detailed and general control. While it is not necessarily good management to seek control over every

specific aspect of the deployment of labour and the control of time and effort, capitalist management can hardly do without control over the production process at a more general level. In the end, it is general control which matters, and as observed by Edwards, 'a "high" level of shopfloor control of the details of the work process need not lead to a "low" level of managerial success in the pursuit of its wider ends' (1983:21). But it should also be stressed that the structure of management control must be studied as a whole, and that worker controls on 'details of the work process' may restrain to some extent the production of surplus value if management does not effectively control the situation at the intermediate level within its organisation. For instance, semi-autonomous work groups are only tolerable, and even profitable, to management when the latter is well in command of production activities above the shop-floor level, which is one of the 'favourable conditions' found in non-unionised factories. Hence we come back to the point made in the preceding section on the complementarity of the different levels of control, a determining element on the whole pattern of control.

It is tempting to suggest a distinction between job control practices which do not confront management interests openly and others which are seen more clearly as antagonistic and detrimental to managerial aims with respect to production. For example, worker control over the details of assignment of labour in the press shop may be seen as a manifestation of what was called earlier the delegation of control at work. In contrast, the control imposed by the same group of employees over the intensity and distribution of effort, and indeed over the very use of their working time, may be interpreted as an antagonistic form of job control. Although this analytical distinction may be useful, we nevertheless come to the conclusion that the forms of delegation of

control at work observed here were also a contributing force in the erosion of the general control exercised by management over labour utilisation. Again, the pattern of control depends very much upon the interaction between the different forms and levels of control. Hence, at Firm B, the many forms of worker control over labour utilisation and effort documented in this thesis had the cumulative effect of harming the programme conceived and administered by management for the realisation of profit. Here is a situation where, independently of the aims of job control, these forms of individual and collective resistance have hurt the employer, whatever the intrinsic value of managerial policies and practices with respect to labour productivity. There are two different notions implied in this assessment. First, the lack of convergence between workers' behaviour and especially the outcome of their action on the one hand, and their consciousness and intention on the other, represents a phenomenon which deserves more attention in industrial sociology (Maitland, 1980:355-6; Edwards and Scullion, 1982a:197-8). Secondly, to suggest, as we do here, that job control affected the realisation of a specific management programme is not to say that this model of management was in itself a way towards productivity and profitability. It does not mean either that it would necessarily have been successful had the workplace organisation and job control been much weaker.

In another respect, job control is vulnerable because of the sectional nature of this form of worker resistance. Sectionalism has been a major theme of this dissertation, especially in Chapter 5. It may be explained to some extent by structural forces such as the division of labour and the pattern of shop steward representation. Hence the British pattern of workplace unionism is favourable to job control, but

the corollary of this is the tendency to fragmentation and the difficulty of developing worker cohesiveness, even at the factory or company levels. The notions of 'factory class consciousness' (Beynon, 1973:98; also Batstone, Boraston and Frenkel, 1977:250) and 'sectional consciousness' (Edwards and Scullion, 1982a:222) have been well discussed in the literature.

This is a complex question, however, because of the contradictory effects of sectionalism on job control. Indeed, it is argued in this thesis that shop-floor organisations which follow the contours of the division of labour are favourable to job control. This may even be necessary to build up worker control over the work process and make it resistant to pressures coming from formal collective bargaining above the shop-floor level. The counterpart, however, is that workers may appear very divided and disorganised when management is committed to challenge job control more unilaterally. Hence, while a sectional organisation may have a positive effect on the development of job control, the lack of a more collective consciousness may be felt strongly when workers face a more general offensive on the part of the employer.

The struggle for the protection of job control at the most sectional level may be seen as short-sighted and meaningless beyond the most pragmatic preoccupation with 'making the job pay'. Such a judgment would appear to be unfair, however, unless proper consideration is given to the whole structure and process of control as well as to the question of alternative courses for collective action. Nevertheless, a major problem is that sectionalism adds to the natural frailty of job control. At Factory B, by the time of our observation, fragmentation within the organisation had made the progress achieved over the years more

vulnerable in at least two ways. First, it was obvious that the shop-floor organisation was not able to generate the degrees of central leadership and collectivism which are necessary to address broader-based issues such as redundancies and job security.

The second problem observed was the lack of collective discipline within the shop-floor organisation. For instance, some of the experienced shop stewards were puzzled by the lack of discipline of many operators on agreed daywork who were not spreading effort and were consequently finishing very early. Even worse, from this perspective, was the selfishness of those showing no concern at all for collective output restrictions, as in Press shop no. 4. The argument of this 'old guard' of stewards was that such a pattern of behaviour may provoke and even legitimise an eventual management offensive to 'correct the situation'. This could jeopardise the progress made over the last fifteen years or so against what was originally an authoritarian management. This constitutes in fact another theme of the debate within the shop steward organisation between those arguing that 'responsible' shop stewards should fill the gap created by weaker shop-floor management, and the majority sticking to the traditional stance of 'it is management's job to manage' (Chapter 5). The trade union principle put forward by the minority was that the more control you get out of management, the more you must exercise collective discipline in enforcing it. But the fact is that this view did not always prevail on the shop-floor.

The vulnerability of job control does not lie simply in the fact that it may be eroded progressively, but also in that the employer has the ultimate power of changing the very basis of work relations in the factory. As Edwards and Scullion (1982a:187) point out, 'management can always re-define the situation'. Having well documented the extensive range of control over effort existing in one firm at the time

of their fieldwork, they noted how

> this was a temporary accommodation, and changing external conditions, notably a falling market share, problems of profitability and a need to 'rationalize' operations, led management to challenge the pattern of control which had been built up. (1982a:199)

Hence, one may question the logic of particular forms of worker control over labour utilisation and subordination which may have an adverse effect on job security. By giving too little consideration to the viability of the firm, and even contributing to its relative decline, workers may follow a self-defeating pattern of behaviour. The question is made more relevant in the context of economic crisis, when management is still less isolated from market constraints and could be tempted to take drastic action.

The position adopted here is that the type of shop-floor action observed at Firm B need not be irrational. Obviously, the problem of rationality remains very complex, particularly with reference to industrial behaviour. As Hyman (1978:25) has stressed,

> the concepts of efficiency and rationality apply properly to the evaluation of alternative means to given ends. Unless these ends are known, it is not logically possible to evaluate the rationality or efficiency of any act or practice as a means. Nor can it be assumed that the objectives of one party to a relationship necessarily coincide with those of others: what is rational and efficient for one may be irrational and inefficient for those with different aims and interests.

One should not presume either that workers had not seen the implications of their action. Perhaps the range of choices open to them did not allow for a more appropriate course of action from their viewpoint. Although most workers and shop stewards were aware that strict protection of job control could harm job prospects, they could not conceive of another pattern of rational behaviour on the basis of which they could organise and mobilise. Such a positive strategy for control was not

discussed in the factory and, as a matter of fact, this did not appear on the agenda of the British labour movement.

These workers shared an overwhelming feeling of a lack of control over economic policies, both at the level of external market forces as well as within the firm. There was 'nothing you could do about it'. And as regards the decisions which may be controlled at factory level, the management programme was not perceived as coherent and stimulating enough to alter the defensive and pragmatic attitude inspiring workers' behaviour. Indeed, on several grounds they were very critical of management. It was not clear to workers and shop stewards that management had a general and coherent vision of the way productivity and labour relations could be improved, so that the enterprise could be put back on a sound basis. Hence, these workers were 'exhibiting the characteristics of anomie: a feeling that they could not control their own destinies and that they were trapped in a profoundly irrational situation' (Edwards, 1983:44). In this context, simply giving up job control was not a rational course of action either. Without getting involved in the general discussion about the influence of low value-consensus on the occurrence of 'industrial disorder' in Britain (Goldthorpe, 1977; Maitland, 1980, 1983), this would appear to hold some significance here. Most probably, the endemic feeling that management was not the unique possessor of rationality was founded on more profound values about industrial conflict. In an important essay in which he discussed the historical foundation of this 'conflictual strategy' adopted by British labour, Alan Fox (1978:20) noted that

> rank-and-file employees do not, on the whole, accept management leadership in the work situation; they do not see themselves as members of a works community; and they rarely appear to act on the principle that their own welfare is bound up with the economic health of the enterprise in which they are employed.

While the managerial approach was not convincing enough, workers were not able either to develop an alternative course of action within their organisation. It was stressed in this dissertation that the organisational basis of British workplace unionism does not favour the development of collective strategies above the level of production. In short, the problem is not that the strength of this type of workers' organisation rests at the point of production; this may be the most significant basis for challenging management and shifting the frontier of control in capitalist enterprises. The major problem is rather the lack of necessary ideology and organisational resources to articulate the demand for control and develop collectively a broader and more positive strategy.

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